THE TRUE JESUS CHRIST

UNKNOWN TO CHRISTIANITY

by David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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A single book can change people forever. *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* does this!

There has never been a book like it!

Bringing *God's* perspective, and in plain language, it is based entirely on Scripture, and known facts of history. It examines the life, ministry and teachings of Jesus as *never* before, and excludes popular tradition, theory and opinion—the usual approach to His life.

Do you understand Jesus' family life, social environment and the first-century world, as well as how He was both God and Man, what His Coming achieved and the purpose of His triumphant Return? Have you comprehended the long, agonizing hours during which Jesus was *illegally* arrested, tried, humiliated, tortured and subjected to the worst instrument of execution devised by men? What about His clash with Satan, and how this determined the *ultimate destiny* of all nations? And what of how that battle is tied to the *true* gospel, the only message Jesus brought—but so few have heard?

The Bible speaks of "Jesus Christ," but also warns of "another Jesus." Almost impossible to believe, nearly all worship the WRONG ONE! How does one know the difference—how do you discern which is which?

In-depth knowledge of the *true* Jesus Christ is about to enter your view for the first time…

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Introduction

Opinions range widely about Who and What was Jesus Christ—as well as what He means in today's world. But few disagree that He forever changed the course of history and civilization.

In the first century AD, huge throngs of listeners followed Him in every city, in awe of the powerful miracles He performed and the words He spoke. Demons were cast out. People were raised from the dead. Food was multiplied. People were healed. Myths were shattered. Lives were changed.

Through the centuries, thousands of books, stories, television documentaries, films and even novels have been written and produced about Jesus Christ. Hundreds of thousands of churches have been erected in His name. Millions have claimed to be His ministers. Billions have professed Him "Lord and Savior."

Today, Jesus is renowned the world over, commonly known in one way or another in every culture of the world, whether one professes to be Christian, atheist, or of any other religion. Many have positive comments about Him, regardless of their beliefs about who He was and what He taught. His name also stirs great controversy and debate.

Yet, despite worldwide recognition—despite billions professing to be His followers—despite all the knowledge circulating about Him—Jesus Christ remains unknown—even *to Christianity*!

We must ask: Is it possible the central figure of a religion could be unknown to almost all who profess to follow Him? If so, how did this happen?

Popular Views

Many have accepted without question what they have heard, read or were taught throughout their lives about Christ and the teachings He brought. These same people usually vigorously defend their beliefs while feeling no need to examine PROOF of *why* they believe what they do—or to consider *how* they came to such beliefs. Human nature follows the crowd, which follows what is popular.

This has been the case with virtually every one of the widely accepted teachings, traditions and practices of mainstream Christianity. Few are aware—or even care—that these have been taken almost entirely from paganism, false customs and human reasoning—and *not* from the Bible. Most of the teachings of Christendom have no biblical basis whatsoever—and in many cases Jesus actually commands the exact opposite!

Thus, the Jesus Christ of the Bible has been left out of professing Christianity—unknown to vast millions, hidden in a cloud of deceit, confusion, lies and commonly accepted falsehoods.

What is *your* view of Jesus? What image does His name evoke? Perhaps you picture a weak, long-haired, sickly-looking man in a flowing white robe. Maybe you think of "baby Jesus" in a manger, with three "wise men" giving Him gifts on December 25. You might think of a figure in a loincloth hanging from a cross with trickles of blood oozing from His side and the crown of thorns piercing His head. Maybe Easter eggs and sunrise services come to mind, or the Christmas season.

You might also envision Jesus standing on a street corner pleading with people to give their hearts to Him. Perhaps you hear Him saying, "Love is everything. Show love to all people and accept Me into your hearts to be saved." You might also picture Jesus walking through villages giving money to the poor, or saying, "Just believe in Me. Obedience is no longer necessary, nor are works of any kind."

These and other well-known views of Jesus Christ have been driven into the minds of countless billions over the centuries. Though commonly believed—and they are!—these images and perceptions fail the test of careful biblical and historical examination. The popular, mainstream ideas about the supposed Christ of the Bible and what He taught simply do not measure up to the facts—the largely unassembled facts that have always been available—and you will see proof of this beyond doubt.

Truly Unique

Unlike anything *ever* produced, *The True Jesus Christ – Unknown to Christianity* accurately examines the life and teachings of the most influential Person in the history of mankind. It takes you on an extraordinary and gripping journey through the corridors of the life and time of Jesus Christ and *correctly* answers the greatest questions about Him—straight from the Bible and secular history.

You will learn what only a tiny few have understood.

What did the real Jesus look like? What was His life's purpose—His *ultimate* mission? When was He born? Why did He need to die? Has He always existed? What did it mean that He was the prophesied Messiah—the Christ? Did He abolish the Ten Commandments? Was the gospel He preached about Himself—or something else? What did He teach of being born again? Did Jesus teach that Christians should observe the Passover—and, if so, how? What about the observance of other days? Who will rule with Him in the world to come? What is the kingdom of God? Who is the "another Jesus" of whom the apostle Paul spoke?

All these questions—and *many* more—are clearly answered in plain, easy-to-understand language. As with some movies, the book returns to certain events, in this case regarding Jesus' life, bringing occasional repetition where additional points must be made.

The most difficult thing for any person is to admit being wrong. Unlearning false knowledge and learning true knowledge in its place is not easy. This can be a painful, shattering experience. Throw aside *all* preconceived ideas. Do not permit yourself to discount any of this book's contents simply because you are accustomed to a particular belief, even one held your entire life. Instead, diligently investigate in the pages of your Bible what is revealed. Be like the Berean Greeks who "received the word [the apostle Paul's preaching] with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Read the book, including every inset, all the way through the stunning conclusion. Prepare to be surprised—if not shocked—at what you are about to learn! As you read with an open mind, you will have *absolutely no doubt* the *true* Jesus Christ *is* UNKNOWN TO CHRISTIANITY!

A narrative style in the early chapters best opens the book…

The Early Years

It started with Mary. She was a young Jewish girl engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. Mary thought she had her life planned: marriage, bearing children, raising a family, growing old together with Joseph, one day enjoying her own grandchildren and perhaps great-grandchildren.

Mary had no hint that she had been selected to experience a monumental, life-changing event, a major step that would be part of the overarching Plan of God, affecting all peoples—past, present and future.

At a point, Mary came face to face with an archangel named Gabriel. He, with Michael and originally Lucifer, is one of three Cherubim named in the Bible. The archangels were given charge over hundreds of millions of angels (Rev. 12:4; 5:11).

God sent Gabriel to Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, to carry out a special mission. "Hail, you who are highly favored," he greeted young Mary. "The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

Mary was familiar with Old Testament accounts of God-fearing men and women who had encountered angels. Now *she* was standing before such a being. Naturally, she was startled, rendered virtually speechless; after all, God rarely sends angels to appear before human beings.

As Gabriel watched her struggle to find the right words in response, he said, "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

The angel's words put her at ease—though she was taken aback when she heard the almost impossible to comprehend news: "Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

For centuries, the house of Judah had suffered under the brutal attacks, conquests and oppression of foreign empires: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks—and now the Romans. With each generation of the Jewish peoples came a national longing for the long-awaited Messiah, or Christ, which means "anointed."

"Finally," Mary thought, "the Messiah will arrive and set things right!" Then she thought deeply within herself: "Christ will be born through my flesh?—How can this be? I have never been with a man."

Mary was a virgin. Truly the conception and birth of this special Child, who "shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35), would be extraordinary—miraculous—unique in all history.

Gabriel explained that her unique pregnancy would be possible by the power of the Holy Spirit—the same limitless power God used to create and sustain the vast, ever-expanding universe (John 1:1-3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2).

Mary had much to think about. There was Joseph, her fiancé, who expected to marry a virgin: Would he believe Mary's explanation that her pregnancy was of God? There was her family: Would they think Mary had shamed herself and her family members by being unfaithful to Joseph? And there were her friends, neighbors and peers: Would they conclude that she would give birth to an illegitimate child?

To encourage her, Gabriel announced that Elisabeth, Mary's cousin, "has also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. *For with God nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:36-37).

His words strengthened Mary. She replied, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word" (vs. 38). No matter what she would encounter from this point forward—even possibly being ostracized by Joseph and all her loved ones—Mary was determined to follow God's will.

Two Cousins—Two Very Special Pregnancies

Mary stayed with Elisabeth for a while, and learned that her elderly cousin had also encountered Gabriel. First, the archangel appeared

to Elisabeth's husband, Zachariah, telling the priest that his wife would give birth to a son, despite her advanced age and never having borne a child.

Gabriel told the parents they were to name the baby "John," saying the child "shall be called the prophet of the Highest: for [he] shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways" (Luke 1:76).

Zachariah and Elisabeth would rear John to be set apart for special service to God. For the rest of his life he would abstain from wine or strong alcoholic beverages. Also, John was to be filled with God's Spirit from the womb (Luke 1:15).

Gabriel explained that John, "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17), was to "prepare the way before…the Lord" (Mal. 3:1)—Christ's First Coming. (John's Elijah ministry would be a forerunner of another man to come centuries later—an end-time Elijah—whose ministry God would use to prepare a people for Christ's Return.)

Character and Genealogy

Three months later, Mary returned home, not knowing how Joseph would react to her noticeable pregnancy. Joseph, quite naturally, was shocked. As she told of her account with Gabriel and that God had chosen her to give birth to His Son, the Christ, Joseph struggled to control his emotions. As much as he wanted to believe Mary, it was hard for him to accept that she had not been unfaithful to him—that she was somehow a virgin, yet obviously pregnant, and that God was the father of her unborn Child.

How could such a thing possibly be? Joseph must have thought.

According to the custom of the day, an engagement was considered a binding agreement, with the engaged couple viewed as virtually married. Thus, Joseph was considered (by tradition) to be Mary's "husband" (Matt. 1:18-19), except they were not to engage in sexual relations until after their official wedding ceremony. Seeing that Mary was clearly pregnant and knowing he was not the father, Joseph would have naturally felt betrayed. Legally, it was within his rights to publicly humiliate her.

But Joseph possessed very unusual character, and deeply loved Mary. Instead of calling attention to her alleged adultery, he decided to handle the situation honorably by quietly annulling their agreement to marry.

That night, as Joseph weighed the matter in his mind, Gabriel appeared to him in a dream. The archangel confirmed that Mary had

not been unfaithful, and that the Child she carried was of God. Joseph awoke and followed Gabriel's instruction to take Mary as his wife, not to engage in sexual relations until after she gave birth, and to help her rear Jesus into adulthood.

Since God can turn the hearts of kings and commoners alike to fulfill His great purpose (Ezra 1:1 and 6:22), He could have selected any couple to bear and rear His Son. Yet God chose Mary and Joseph for at least two reasons:

First, God foretold long ago that a Messiah—an anointed King, but also a Savior—would come from the Israelite tribe of Judah, born from the line of King David. Both Mary and Joseph were Jews, descended from David; through their genealogy, Jesus could confirm that He descended from the Davidic bloodline both *physically* (through His mother) and *legally* (through His human father, who was Jesus' legal guardian).

Second, though Mary and Joseph were not perfect, they were people of honor and character. Adultery and all other forms of promiscuity were common—yet Mary saved her virginity for her future husband. Also, rather than rebelling against God, she submitted to His will, despite the rumors and whisperings of being an unwed mother. And Joseph, despite initially presuming the love of his life had been unfaithful to him, acted honorably instead of with public indignation (Matt. 1:19).

Jesus' Birth: Separating Fact from Fiction

Most people are, to varying degrees, familiar with the story about Joseph and a now full-term pregnant Mary journeying to Bethlehem, a small village just outside Jerusalem, to register in an empire-wide census decreed by Rome. According to the account, the couple arrived to find Bethlehem filled with visitors from the region, leaving the young couple without a place to stay at the local inn. Ever resourceful, Joseph and Mary decided to temporarily stay in a stable, where the young mother supposedly gave birth to Jesus on December 25.

Then shepherds out in the fields and pastures witnessed a stunning supernatural event—a great star in the heavens—a sign that the Christ Child was born. Also, a supposed three "wise men" from the East came to Bethlehem to honor Jesus. Herod, Rome's client king over Judea, felt threatened by Jesus' existence. Since he could not find the Child, Herod decided to massacre all baby boys that were estimated to be Jesus' age.

Or so went the account, which grew over the centuries, weaving chapters from the Bible with Christmas myths originating from Babylonian mystery religions practiced by idol worshippers since the tower of Babel! To understand the events surrounding Jesus Christ's birth and His early years, we must separate fact from fiction.

First, despite what billions today believe, Jesus was *not* born on December 25, or even in winter. He was, in all likelihood, born in early autumn.

The A*dam Clarke Commentary*, volume 5, page 370, New York edition, states this: "It was custom among Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts about the Passover [early spring], and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain." The first rains began in early to mid-fall.

Continuing with this same quote: "During the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As…the first rain began early in the month of [Heshvan], which answers to part of our October and November [begins sometime in October], we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole summer. And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could He have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground, the nativity in December should be given up. The feeding of the flocks by night in the fields is a chronological fact…See the quotations from the Talmudists in Lightfoot."

Luke 2:8 explains that when Christ was born "there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Note that they were "abiding" in the field. This could not have happened in December, or even close. Both Ezra 10:9-13 and the Song of Solomon 2:11 show that winter was the rainy season, and shepherds could not reside in cold, open fields at night.

Numerous encyclopedias plainly state that Jesus was not born on December 25. Even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* confirms this!

Then from where did the festival associated with this date originate?

Read the following quote from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, under "Christmas": "In the Roman world, the Saturnalia (December 17) was a time of merrymaking and exchanging of gifts. *December 25 was also regarded as the birthdate of the Iranian mystery god Mithra*, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule

rites when the Teutonic tribes penetrated into Gaul, Britain and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian" (15th Edit. Vol. II, p. 903).

Next is a quote from the December 1984 *Toronto Star* article: "We owe a lot to Druids, Dutch," by Alan Edmonds: "The Reformation cast a blight on Christmas. By then, of course, clever ecclesiastical politicians had adopted the pagan mid-winter festival as the alleged birthdate of Jesus, of Nazareth, and thrown in a few other pagan goodies to make their takeover more palatable."

Why Late December?

Understand. December 25 was not selected because it was the birth of Jesus Christ or because it was near that date. It was selected entirely because the 25th of December coincided with the idolatrous pagan festival Saturnalia!

In any event, we do not know the exact date of Jesus' birth (though in all likelihood, He was born in the fall). While God certainly could have made it clearly known, He chose to hide it from the world's eyes.

For years, the birth of Jesus has been shrouded in the pagan trappings of Christmas, whose traditions and practices predate Christ's earthly ministry by thousands of years!

Billions around the world exchange gifts with each other every December 25, believing they are following the "three wise men's" custom of giving birthday gifts to Jesus. Yet the "three wise men" of the Xmas myth are called "magi" in the Bible, magicians from the East. Scripture does not specify how many visited Jesus. Also, the magi gave gifts to the Christ Child out of respect and royal tradition: They acknowledged Him to be a king, and thus treated Him as such, practicing the custom of giving gifts to a royal ruler. These were in no sense birthday gifts. By the time the magi visited Jesus, He and His parents were no longer in the stable. They were in a house, and the Bible refers to Christ as a "young child" (Matt. 2:8, 11), not a baby. Much time had passed between Jesus' birth and the magi's visit. This is why Herod slaughtered all baby boys up to two years old—it was not evident to him how many years had passed since Jesus had been born!

When we separate fact from fiction—that is, biblical truth from the lies and deceits of pagan myth and legend—we get a better, much clearer view of the true Jesus Christ!

Christ's Ministry—Almost Entirely Overlooked Purpose

When the magi asked Herod, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:1-2), Herod "was troubled, and *all* Jerusalem with him" (vs. 3).

Why? Herod learned from the Jewish religious leaders that Christ was foretold to be born in Bethlehem—this came from God's Word. You would think that Herod and "all Jerusalem with him" would be excited over the news, not "troubled."

Herod and the religious authorities of the day felt threatened by Christ's existence—why?

The story of Jesus Christ's miraculous conception and birth is known worldwide and has been taught from generation to generation for nearly 2,000 years. But what did it *mean*? What was its true significance?

The Bible identifies Jesus in His pre-existence before human birth as "the Word," an eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful God-being who "was *with* God, and…*was* God" (John 1:1). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (vs. 14)—He voluntarily lowered Himself to become limited, corruptible flesh, subject to weariness and death.

Why?

The varying and competing denominations, sects, arms, churches and movements of professing Christianity preach that Jesus came to save the whole world. "For God so loved the world," their pastors, teachers and religionists frequently recite, "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Even those who have never opened a Bible are familiar with the biblical account in the book of Genesis, in which Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, thus cutting themselves off from the utopian Garden of Eden—and more importantly, from the One who created it: God.

Subsequently, every man, woman and child for the past 6,000 years has had at least one thing in common: "For all have *sinned*, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "All" means ALL—not "some," not "most." *Every* human being—even Noah, Abraham, Moses, Job, Daniel and other righteous, faithful servants of God—has sinned.

But what is sin?

Sin Defined

The leaders and instructors of the world's two billion-plus professing Christians *talk* almost endlessly about sin—more accurately,

they talk *around* sin, freely promoting their own interpretation and personal opinion of what sin is—yet they do not stand before their listeners, open their Bibles and read aloud I John 3:4—"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: *for sin is the transgression of the law.*"

Grasp this important biblical truth!

Sin is the breaking of the Law—*God's* Law, which is "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12) and is "spiritual" (vs. 14). Religionists preach a message of "Come as you are," shamelessly proclaiming that "Jesus did away with the Law" and has removed "the terrible burden of keeping it."

Yet the Word of God—"quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12) and "cannot be broken" (John 10:35)—declares the opposite: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: *and His commandments are not grievous*" (I John 5:3). But many believe they are!

Breaking even one of God's commandments earns the offender the same penalty as breaking all of them. Notice: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law" (Jms. 2:10-11).

The penalty of sin—the wages that one earns for breaking God's Law—is plainly defined: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Some critics have sought to rationalize this verse. "This doesn't *literally* mean death," they claim. "It means being cut off from God."

Yet God declares that man is *already* cut off from Him! Notice: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have *separated* between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

Because of sin, of lawlessness, humanity is already separated from God. Death is the ultimate state of being cut off from our Maker. This is twice reiterated in the Old Testament: "The soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

There are two ways to satisfy the wages of breaking the laws of God:

(A) One can die for his own sins and thus pay the penalty. But there is the obvious problem: Once a sinner is dead, he *stays* dead.

(B) Someone can die in that person's stead. However, the rest of Ezekiel 18, verse 20, shows that a human being cannot pay for the sins of others; each person can only pay for his or her own transgressions.

It takes the death of a supreme, innocent, eternal God-being to satisfy the penalty for the sins of all human beings—past, present and future.

Humanity needed a Savior!

Christ's Pre-existence

Read the full context of what the apostle John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). Two divine Beings, both called God.

In Genesis 1:26, it was God—*Elohim*, a uniplural term in the original Hebrew, indicating more than one were present—who said, "Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, after *Our* likeness." So few seem to notice the three plural pronouns.

Through the Word, "All things were made…and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3)—"For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him" (Col. 1:16).

The Word voluntarily decided to be born of a woman, to become God in the flesh. Because He was the Supreme Creator, His divine life far out-valued His creation. And because He was physical—subject to pulls of the flesh—He was capable of committing sin. Yet if He never strayed, never broke God's laws, as a God-Being in the flesh, He could offer His sinless, innocent life as the ultimate and perfect sacrifice.

Man would have a Savior.

Incomplete Emphasis

But human beings, who love to go to extremes, focus almost exclusively on Jesus' role as Savior—and ignore that He was born to be a king! False religious leaders, whether knowingly or unknowingly, assert that Christ's role as Savior is the "climax of the plan of God for humanity."

This is not the climax—it is the beginning of God's Plan and purpose for mankind. A Divine Savior is necessary for sins to be forgiven, for people's lives to be wiped clean, no longer under the penalty of death. Yet religionists and theologians leap to the conclusion that "the forgiveness of sin will solve man's problems." The trends, problems, troubles and ills saturated throughout man's governments and societies will not suddenly disappear if everyone simply said, "I accept Jesus as my Savior," and asked God to forgive their sins.

Something else must take place, and Christ set the pattern to follow: One must conform to the laws and ways of the kingdom of God. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God. He was sent to qualify to replace Satan as world ruler. Upon His Return, Christ will establish God's government on the Earth to rule all nations. During His First Coming, Jesus represented God's kingdom and instructed all whom His Father would call (John 6:44). He taught them how to obey the gospel (Rom. 10:16; II Thess. 1:8; I Pet. 4:17)—to come out of the world's ways and become ambassadors of God's government of peace, following Christ's command to "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Of course, all of these things require discussion in greater detail as the book develops.

Remember, Gabriel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

At the end of His ministry, Jesus said before Pilate, "My kingdom [government] is not of this world" (John 18:36). When asked by Pilate if He were a king, Christ responded, "You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause [reason] came I into the world" (vs. 37).

This was foretold in the book of Isaiah: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever" (9:6-7).

For this reason, Herod and "all Jerusalem with him" were troubled. They feared losing their positions of civil and religious leadership that Rome permitted them to enjoy. They were also fearful of how the Roman Empire would react to the appearance of a "rival king" claiming rulership over Judea. Yet these carnal minds did not understand that Christ would not set up His kingdom from Jerusalem in their lifetimes.

Jesus Christ was born into humble circumstances, yet His life and ministry lays the groundwork for man's incredible future and potential!

The Missing Years

When most people think of Jesus Christ's time on Earth as a human being, they think either of a dead Savior hanging from a cross or a helpless baby lying in a manger.

Few picture a growing, energetic boy who played games with His childhood friends and performed household chores. Few imagine God-in-the-flesh—a Man who sweated as He eagerly labored in His human father's profession. Who may have had to diplomatically rebuff peer pressure from family and friends to get married and start a family—or to participate in any other activities that would have thwarted His supreme Purpose. Who freely laughed and expressed a good sense of humor. Who was unafraid to shed tears in empathy for others. Who enjoyed delicious food and drink, and life in general, yet always with perfect moderation.

Jesus was real—He felt, He spoke, He observed, worked, ate and breathed. He was both Man and God, physical yet divine. During His 33½ years of human existence, Christ experienced life as a baby, then a toddler, boy, teenager and young adult, into manhood. God inspired Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to record the details of Jesus' 3½-year ministry. Yet, when it comes to His early years, from ages 12 to 30, the Bible reveals very little.

Some, relying on human reasoning and theory, have invented stories about these "lost" years. One tells of a young Jesus learning the mystic arts in Egypt. Another tale has Him journeying across the Atlantic Ocean to preach to the American Indians, who some believe

to be the "lost ten tribes" of Israel. But these or other fictional stories are not supported by the Bible.

Scripture gives a few details about Christ's boyhood and coming of age years—and we should not be surprised. For example, God's Word provides only a basic outline, along with a few highlights, of the Pre-Flood World, a 2,000-year period from Adam to Noah in which hundreds of thousands—perhaps even millions—of people had lived.

Psalm 12:6 states, "The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." The Bible says exactly what God wants it to say, and the Creator wants human beings, His creation, to focus on the things He requires us to know.

While we cannot know every event that occurred on Christ's path from adolescence to adulthood, we can piece together certain scriptures, along with history and the traditions of the time, to capture a broad yet clear view of Jesus' early life. As we do, we will see God's overarching two-fold Purpose for His Son's First Coming.

Wrong Expectations

God sent an angel to warn Joseph in a dream that Herod the Great sought to murder the Christ Child (Matt. 2:13). Joseph quickly followed God's instruction to gather Mary and little Jesus, and take refuge in Egypt, which was outside of Herod's legal jurisdiction. They returned to Judea after Herod's death, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, in which God said that He "called My Son out of Egypt."

The Jews, reading Micah 5:2, expected the Messiah to publicly appear from Bethlehem: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

However, God had other plans. Though His Son was born in Bethlehem, God chose to rear Him in a place most people least expected: Nazareth, in Galilee, Joseph and Mary's hometown.

The name "Nazareth" means "separated, crowned, sanctified" and "the guarded one." Easton's 1897 *The Bible Dictionary* describes the town as being "situated among the southern ridges of Lebanon, on the steep slope of a hill, about 14 miles from the Sea of Galilee and about six west from Mount Tabor…The main road for traffic between Egypt and the interior of Asia passed by Nazareth near the foot of Tabor, and thence northward to Damascus."

The people of Judea, especially citizens of Jerusalem, looked down upon the Galileans, whom they viewed as socially unsophisticated—in

effect, "backwoods" people. But God declares, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways…For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

Although the Messiah was foretold to come from Nazareth, when Christ's ministry began, His Galilee upbringing still became a stumbling block for many in "cosmopolitan" Jerusalem. (See John 1:45-46 and 7:40-42.) Of the many that God would call, only a few would look past physical appearances and social backgrounds and appreciate the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44) of truth in Christ's teachings.

Dynamics of Family Life

Jesus had four younger brothers—James, Joses, Simon and Judas—and at least two sisters (Matt. 13:55-56; Mark 6:3). While all of the seven or more siblings were born from the same mother, Jesus' brothers and sisters were from the union of Mary and Joseph.

After Gabriel first appeared to Joseph in a dream, "Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not [did not engage in sexual relations] TILL she had brought forth her firstborn Son" (Matt. 1:24-25). Joseph married Mary, but did not have marital relations with her until *after* Jesus was born.

This and other passages disprove the popular—yet unscriptural—tradition of Mary's "perpetual virginity." This false doctrine originated from pagan beliefs of various idol-worshipping mystery religions, tracing all the way back to Nimrod and the tower of Babel.

The "perpetual virginity" belief—which falsely teaches that Jesus' mother "must" have been sinless and perfect for her to give birth to the Son of God—only serves to blur Mary's true purpose, and elevates her to a godlike status. Today, a billion-plus professing Christians have been deceived into praying to Mary for her intercession in their lives—when it is *Christ* who is the Mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

As do siblings in other families, Jesus' little brothers and sisters looked up to their big Brother. When they fell into mischief (as little ones tend to do), Jesus was there to set the right example.

Nonetheless, growing up in Joseph and Mary's household was far from being picture perfect. Wherever there is flesh, there is human nature (Rom. 8:7). Galatians 5:19-21 lists the "works of the flesh"—the natural tendencies of man's nature. These include

"*hatred* [enmity, hostility, antagonism], *variance* [quarrel, strife, discord], *emulations* [jealousy, zealous ill will toward others], *wrath* [fury, rage, anger], *strife* [selfish ambition, faction], *seditions* [division, dissension]" and "*envyings*." In a family of at least six siblings, one can expect some degree of rivalry, jealousy and strife during the formative years.

The young Jesus knew He had to rise above this, yet at the same time not allow Himself to fall into self-righteousness. He rejected the pulls and pressures of the flesh, society and Satan, and—being full of God's Spirit from the womb—actively exercised the power of God to produce the evident fruit of "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control]" (vs. 22-23). Jesus was balanced in all things. He had to be—He could not afford to sin, not even once!

No doubt Joseph and Mary told their children on more than one occasion to behave. Perhaps they may have occasionally added, "You should be more like your brother Jesus." It is likely Jesus' balanced, good-natured approach to life may have led a brother or sister to feel jealousy or resentment toward Him, as Cain did toward Abel. Carnal nature has a way of accusing the innocent of wrongdoing.

It is not uncommon for a child to receive blame, even punishment, for wrongs he or she did not commit. Sometimes a brother will falsely accuse another, or allow his sister to take the blame for something that was not her fault. Injustices happen in families—and they probably happened to Jesus. If He were wrongly punished, He would not have sought revenge. He allowed injustice to develop and strengthen Him, to keep Him humble.

Such moments served to reinforce in Jesus the patience described in James 1:2-4, defined as "hopeful, cheerful endurance." It is this godly, patient endurance that builds up holy, righteous character that is "perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Christ was the One who inspired the apostle Peter to write, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

"For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when

He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously" (I Pet. 2:18-23).

Jesus did not just teach the Way of God—He LIVED it!

At the Temple

Consider: Mary saving her virginity until marriage. The integrity and mercy Joseph displayed when he thought his fiancé had been unfaithful. Circumcising their Baby on the eighth day (Luke 2:21-24), as instructed in the Old Testament. Clearly, Joseph and Mary feared and worshipped God, and they reared Jesus in a loving, God-fearing, religious household.

As with other Jewish families, they traveled to Jerusalem each spring to observe the Passover season at the Temple (vs. 41). It was an annual pilgrimage that required faith, since their caravan of family, extended family, friends and perhaps acquaintances had to travel through dangerous secluded regions where marauding thieves roamed.

When Jesus was age 12, there was a mix-up: on the return home from the Temple, Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was missing. They had assumed He was among the caravan in the company of relatives or friends—but Jesus could not be found.

"The caravan has already traveled a day's journey from Jerusalem," Mary said to her husband. "By the time we reach the city, Jesus will have wandered around on His own for two full days!"

Joseph tried to console her, but she said, "He's only a boy! What is He going to do for food? What if something bad happens to Him?"

Joseph comforted her with reassuring words: "Don't worry. It will all work out."

Jesus' parents returned to Jerusalem and searched the streets for their little Boy for a full day, until they eventually found Jesus where they had last seen Him: in the Temple. Joseph and Mary were amazed to find Jesus "sitting in the midst of the doctors [scholars of the Law], both hearing them, and asking them questions" (vs. 46). Here was the Son of God, a 12-year-old, surrounded by some of the world's foremost scholars and experts of the Scriptures—"and all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (vs. 47).

From the time that He was born, Jesus "grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him" (vs. 40).

Her Son being missing for three days brought mixed emotions for Mary: fear, worry, helplessness, sorrow, and—after she found her Firstborn safe, calm and without a hint of anxiety on His part—a touch

of anger. "Son, why have You thus dealt with us?" she demanded. "Behold, Your father and I have sought You sorrowing" (vs. 48).

The preteen calmly replied, "How is it that you sought Me? Know you not that I must be about My Father's business?" (vs. 49). Jesus had never been irresponsible nor did anything that would have shamed the family. Mary and Joseph knew this. Being a responsible Child, Jesus stayed at the Temple where He would be safe and where He naturally expected His parents to find Him.

Joseph and Mary were aware that Jesus was a special Child, brought into physical existence to fulfill incredible and pivotal roles. In staying at the Temple, Jesus was already preparing Himself for His future ministry, even though it would not start for another 18 years. From a young age, Christ's life was focused on doing His "Father's business," also thought of and known as the Work of God.

Throughout millennia, all of God's servants have had a part in doing God's Work. That same Work exists today. The Restored Church of God is preaching and publishing the gospel of the kingdom of God "in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10), and in feeding, protecting, instructing and leading Christ's sheepfold, the New Testament Church (John 21:15-17; I Pet. 5:1-4).

Though Joseph and Mary did not seem to fully grasp His future responsibilities (Luke 2:50), Jesus did not allow Himself to feel self-important. He humbled Himself and obediently submitted to their parental authority (vs. 51)—despite being the One who created the Earth, moon, sun, stars and everything else in the universe! Christ understood that to someday wield authority one must first learn to *respect* authority.

"And," as He walked meekly through boyhood, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (vs. 52).

Understanding the Plan of God

From His youth, Jesus Christ was well acquainted with the Law of God—His commandments, statutes, precepts and judgments. He should have been, since it was He Who, as the Rock of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:4), declared the Ten Commandments to Israel from atop Mt. Sinai! Being God, Jesus was also well acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Jews, their origins and how they had developed. He knew which ones to honor and how to properly approach them—and which ones to reject.

For example, Jesus kept the yearly spring and fall Holy Days. His observance of them was far more than just a formality of Jewish tradition. As the One who instituted these millennia earlier among His peo-

ple, Christ knew the significance of His annual Sabbaths and festivals, for they each represent a step in the fulfillment of God's great Plan of Salvation:

Passover: On this day God provided the perfect sacrifice to remove all sin: the shed blood and death of Jesus Christ, "our Passover…sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7).

To be born into the kingdom of God, one must first have his or her sins forgiven and be released from the penalty of death.

The Days of Unleavened Bread: This seven-day festival pictures Christ's followers removing pride, vanity and the way of sin—"the leaven of malice and wickedness" (vs. 8)—replacing these with "the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (same verse), which is God's Law (Psa. 119:142) and Word (Matt. 4:4; John 17:17), the Holy Bible.

God uses the number seven as a sign of perfection. The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the lifelong process of removing sin from one's life, to "Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

To be born into God's kingdom, one must live according to the laws governing that kingdom.

The Feast of Firstfruits: Also known as Pentecost, this is the day Christ started the New Testament Church. From righteous Abel down through millennia to John the Baptist, only a few individuals have had the privilege of receiving the Holy Spirit—the awesome power and divine nature of God.

Yet on Pentecost in AD 31, God offered His Spirit to thousands, those whom He called to "come out of" (Rev. 18:4) the ways and pagan customs of this "present evil world [age]" (Gal. 1:4)—to become members of the Body of Christ, the Church of God (Col. 1:18) and the New Testament Temple of the Lord (II Cor. 6:16). Without this Spirit actively at work—converting the thoughts and desires of man to develop into holy, righteous, godly character—"the carnal mind is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

For the past 2,000 years, the Father has been sowing "firstfruit"—spirit-begotten sons who, after having developed His perfect character within them, will be "raised in glory…in power" and "a spiritual body" (I Cor. 15:43-44), inheriting eternal life in the kingdom of God. God's firstfruits will rule under Christ as kings and priests—Spirit-born leaders, judges and teachers who will assist Christ in preparing the rest of humanity for achieving its awesome potential!

To inherit the kingdom of God, one must have God's Spirit in him: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God…

The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:14, 16-17).

The Feast of Trumpets: This pictures Jesus Christ's Return to establish the government of God and rule all nations. Also notice: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14-15).

Those whom God calls now have been granted an opportunity to qualify for eternal life and rulership—to be resurrected into spirit beings at Christ's Return (I Cor. 15:50-54; I Thes. 4:15-17) and reign with Him in administering God's government throughout the Earth (Rev. 5:10; 20:6).

The Day of Atonement: This represents a time when the collective sins of mankind will be placed on the originator of carnal nature: Satan the devil, who, for the past almost 6,000 years, as the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), has broadcast every sick, vile, perverse attitude, motive and thought imaginable. With man's sins placed on him, the devil—and his demons—will be exiled by God and no longer able to influence humanity. Finally, man will be at one with his Maker ("atonement" means "at-one-ment"), ready to come under the merciful dominion of God's supergovernment.

The Feast of Tabernacles: Next is the time period representing when Christ will rule over the wonderful world to come! No more wars—no violence of any kind. No more divorce, adultery, fornication or split families. People will learn to live God's Way of GIVE—the way of helping, cooperation, teamwork—as opposed to Satan's way of GET—cutthroat competition, stealing, robbing. The terror, despair and insecurity of this modern age will be replaced by true joy, prosperity and security—the fruit of diligently observing God's Law.

Those whom God calls now celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles each fall—which is a foretaste of an incredible age, to be ruled by God's kingdom, that is just over the horizon!

The Last Great Day: God will eventually bring back to life every man, woman and child who ever died. The time when He will do this is described in Revelation 20:12-13.

Today, God is judging His firstfruits, those He calls now: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God…" (I Pet. 4:17).

Over time, God will judge the rest of humanity. Those few called now and the many billions called later will be given an opportunity to qualify for eternal life in His kingdom.

Unlike His contemporaries, Jesus knew the true purpose of the annual Holy Days. They outline the steps by which man can attain his ultimate destiny.

Sadly, very few people today observe these days, believing they were "only for the Jews" and popular teaching that "Jesus did away with them." As a result, few understand God's Plan of salvation for mankind.

What Did Jesus Look Like?

For hundreds of years, artists have used their vivid imaginations to illustrate what Jesus looked like as a man. But in doing so, they err in two ways. Some little space will be taken to clarify this.

First, creating illustrations of Jesus breaks the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10).

Second, artistic renditions of Christ's image depict Him as deathly thin, with long hair, soft, effeminate features, and a sentimental, sanctimonious look in His eyes. This is the common portrayal of Jesus found in paintings across the world, which started appearing on the scene hundreds of years after Jesus' death.

While common as daylight, this depiction is simply not historically accurate on a number of fronts. It should be noted that the New Testament does not explicitly describe what Jesus looked like, and no eyewitness drawings of Him have ever been found. That said, Jesus Christ was Jewish, and as such would have looked like any other Jewish man of His time.

In a 2004 *Reuters* article, physical anthropologist Joe Zias, who has studied hundreds of skeletons found in Jerusalem, stated, "Jesus didn't have long hair. Jewish men back in antiquity did not have long hair."

If Jesus did have long hair, contrary to the accepted style of the time, He would have stood out in a crowd like a sore thumb. Yet on multiple occasions, Jesus managed to slip away amongst the masses and hide from His enemies, who wholeheartedly sought to kill Him (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39). This would have been most difficult to do if He had been the only man with long hair. Jesus was able to flee partly because He was an ordinary-looking Jewish man, not a long-haired "exception to the rule."

Consider the account of Judas' betrayal of Jesus in the book of Mark: "And he [Judas] that betrayed Him had given them a token [sign], saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; take Him, and lead Him

away safely [securely]. And as soon as he was come, he went straightway to Him, and said, Master, Master; and kissed Him. And they laid their hands on Him, and took Him" (14:44-46).

If Jesus had long hair, would it have been necessary for Judas to use a special sign—a kiss—to betray Jesus to His enemies? Of course not. The scribes, chief priests and legionnaires would have easily spotted a singular long-haired person—a kiss would not have been required.

Though not in an obvious way, a particularly strong indication of Jesus' hair length is given in the Bible, in I Corinthians 11:14. The apostle Paul states, "Does not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have *long hair*, it is a *shame* unto him?" The Greek word for "shame" means *disgrace*, *dishonor*, *reproach*, *vile*. These are strong words! No doubt, Paul and some of the people to whom he was writing would have seen Jesus face-to-face, or at least heard descriptions of His appearance, including His hair length.

We might ask: Would an individual (Paul) who proclaimed to be an apostle of Jesus Christ make such a statement about hair length if Jesus had long hair? This would seem most foolish for Paul to do. It would have been a blatant contradiction, and would have probably incited anger or at least bewilderment from those in the Corinth congregation.

Further confirming that Jesus did not have long hair is a wall painting that was erected after Jerusalem was captured in AD 70 to celebrate Rome's victory. It pictures Jewish men with *short hair* being taken into captivity.

An article in the December 2002 issue of *Popular Mechanics*, titled "The Real Face of Jesus," also challenged the commonly held view of Jesus' appearance. The article opens: "From the time Christian children settle into Sunday school classrooms, an image of Jesus Christ is etched into their minds. In North America he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with long, flowing, light brown hair, fair skin and light-colored eyes.

"Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed. A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered."

The article continues: "Using methods similar to those police have developed to solve crimes, British scientists, assisted by Israeli archeologists, have re-created what they believe is the most accurate image of the most famous face in history."

Using modern technology, this team recreated a face that appears nothing like traditional artist renderings.

Until about the age of 30, Jesus was a carpenter. The building trade of that time involved strenuous, back-breaking labor. Those who worked

in this field were required to move and lift heavy stone (carpenters were also stonemasons at that time) and lumber without power tools or mechanical digging equipment of any kind. Week after week, Jesus cut down trees, hauled lumber and giant rocks, and constructed buildings.

Due to working in such an environment, Jesus would have been a rugged, physically fit, masculine-looking man. And He would have worn durable, practical clothing, which would have helped Him to blend in with the crowd, indistinguishable from the common "blue-collar" fisherman with whom He associated. This was another reason He needed to be identified with a kiss when arrested. Also, since Jesus spent most of His time under the Mediterranean sun, His skin would have been tanned—not pale and even chalky as Christendom portrays.

Only a strong, physically fit human being could have survived being severely scourged (Mark 15:15) and fasting 40 days (Matt. 4:1-2), as Jesus did.

The above article also stated, "From analysis of skeletal remains, archeologists had firmly established that the average build of a Semite male at the time of Jesus was 5 ft. 1 in., with an average weight of about 110 pounds. Since Jesus worked outdoors as a carpenter until he was about 30 years old, it is reasonable to assume he was more muscular and physically fit than westernized portraits suggest."

Ultimately, if we think about Christ's appearance at all, we ought to think, in general terms, about how He looks today. Inspired by God, the apostle John in Revelation described Jesus' present appearance: "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire" (1:14).

Under a Nazarite Vow?

Many have been taught that Jesus had long hair because, they claim, He was a "Nazarite"—but what does the Bible say about this?

History shows that the practice of men wearing short hair has been around for a long time—much longer than most realize. At the time Jesus lived, it was the accepted and general custom. For proof, all one need do is pick up any illustrated history book relating to the period. You will find pictures of busts and statues of famous Greeks and Romans of Christ's time. In every case, the men are portrayed with short hair similar to what we find today.

Two excellent books that one may reference are *A History of the Holy Land* (Michael Avi-Yonah, editor) and *Daniel to Paul* (Gaalyahu Cornfeld, editor). On pages 126 to 127 of the former, you will find pictures of the busts of Roman leaders, such as Augustus, Pompey, and

one believed to be Herod. Each has short hair. As a matter of fact, all the carvings and statues of the Roman legionnaires show them as having closely cropped hair. Motion pictures involving stories of this period always portray men with short hair. It would have been quite an oddity for a Roman man to wear his hair long. It used to be the same for all men in our society. The reality is that before, during and after the time of Christ, every Roman emperor from Julius Caesar to Trajan had short hair. And it was the emperor who set the pattern in style and mode of dress for the entire empire.

The Hellenistic Greek culture dominated the Eastern Mediterranean area, influencing Judea before the Romans came on the scene. Quite a large segment of the Jewish population spoke the Greek language and had a Hellenistic view in the time of Christ. (Notice John 12:20 and Acts 6:1.) The style of hair for men of this culture was to wear it short (Cornfeld, pp. 15, 146).

You will find on page 146 of the book *Daniel to Paul* a picture showing a "marble statuette of an unidentified man of the Hellenistic period—a time of close contacts between the Jewish and Hellenistic civilizations in thought, art, and everyday life. Whether Jewish or Gentile, he evokes his age and environment." The man shown in the picture of this statuette had short hair. From the comment made by the author, an historian and archaeologist, it is clear that he could not tell if the man was a Jew or a Gentile. Why? Because throughout the Near-Eastern region, the styles were the same—including short hair on men.

Some argue that those Jews who did not have a Hellenistic view may have worn their hair long. However, in the anti-Hellenistic Jewish Talmud is the instruction that every thirty days, all the priests should cut their hair. Why this instruction if they grew their hair long? These priests were well aware of Ezekiel 44:20: "Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long." God intended that the priests set the example for the rest of the community (Mal. 2:7). Further examination of the Talmud reveals that the hairstyle was "Julian," or what would be called "a Caesar cut" (Sanhedrin 22b).

Jesus Christ was never under a Nazarite vow. He did, however, grow up in Nazareth, fulfilling a prophecy that He would be called a *Nazarene* (Matt. 2:23; Mark 1:9; Luke 1:26; John 1:45). This is why early Christians were sometimes referred to as Nazarenes.

Neither of these words has anything whatsoever to do with a Nazarite vow. Those under a Nazarite vow could not drink wine or touch a dead body. Notice: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord: He shall separate him-

self from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days that he separates himself unto the Lord he shall come at [touch] no dead body" (Num. 6:2-3, 6).

Jesus drank wine (Matt. 11:19) and, on occasion, touched a dead body (Matt. 9:25). If He were under a Nazarite vow, He would not have done either of these things. Those under this vow grew their hair long as a sign of humiliation. Men who wear their hair long today are anything but humble. Rather, they are very proud of their long locks and go to great lengths to show them off. It is a sign of pride—and it is also a sign of defiance against traditional values.

Also notice that when the time of the vow was over, the person under the vow was to shave his head (Num. 6:18)—ending this shameful period!

It is a shame for a man to have his hair long—period! Apart from God's Word, even nature shows this. A man should not look like a woman! For one thing, long hair is not manageable and would just get in his way. A man's hair was never intended to grow long. Long hair on a man interferes with the duties and responsibilities that are part of the male role.

Jesus simply would not have grown His hair long. To do so would have contradicted His Word. Remember, it was Christ—the Word (John 1:1)—who inspired the Bible. II Timothy tells us, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (3:16). And since Jesus Christ also inspired I Corinthians 11:14, He would have been true to His word. And that Word guides and instructs us on the matter of hair lengths and styles for men and women.

Married, Divorced, and Now Engaged

When a young man entered adulthood, parents, grandparents, other family members and peers would encourage him to settle down, get married and start a family. No doubt Jesus received the same pressure. But for Him, marriage was not an option. Jesus had already been married—in fact, He was divorced!

Scripture reveals that the One who became Jesus Christ—the Rock of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:4)—was once married to ancient Israel, the physical "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). But the tribes of Israel—the northern kingdom of the house of Israel and the southern kingdom of the house of Judah—were unfaithful to their Husband. They rejected His divine protection, guidance and instruction, and

Did Jesus Have Brothers and Sisters?

There is a common misconception that Jesus Christ was an only child. In particular, the Catholic Church teaches that it was impossible for Jesus to have brothers and sisters because of the supposed "perpetual virginity" of His mother, Mary.

Yet, Matthew 13:54-56 (NKJV) states, "When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's Son? Is not His mother called Mary? And *His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas*? And *His sisters*, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?'"

From this single passage we can draw a number of conclusions:

- Mary was the mother of Jesus
- Jesus had four brothers
- Jesus had at least two sisters
- Jesus and His six or more siblings had a common mother; there is no mention of what would be other half-brothers or half-sisters

These are the most specific verses identifying the family relations of Jesus Christ. If one accepts these verses, it should be impossible to believe that Jesus was an only child, as this would plainly contradict the Bible.

Another passage clearly shows that Mary, who was a virgin at the birth of Jesus, came together in sexual union with her husband after His birth. Matthew 1:18 (NKJV) states, "Now the birth of Jesus

Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, *before they came together*, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

This implies that, as husband and wife, they eventually shared intimate relations.

Continuing in Matthew 1:20: "But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"

The angel did not express any words forbidding Joseph to take Mary as his wife, but instead encouraged him with the words "do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife." The angel did not say, "Do not dare touch Mary for she is to be a virgin throughout her life."

The concept of Mary's perpetual, or lifelong, virginity derived from the early writings of a Catholic scholar named Origen (AD 185-254). His claims, based on the apocryphal *Gospel of James*, which focuses on the childhood of Mary up to the birth and childhood of Jesus, appeared around the middle of the second century.

This idea dates back to the mystical practices of priestesses who worshipped various deities in Rome. The combination of Christianity and ancient pagan religions attracted early converts and became a dominant religious force. Mary's traditional role as mother was changed and reworked as that of a life-long virgin who should be worshipped as a goddess. This pseudo-Christian ideology made it easier for pagan worshippers to identify with her and, therefore, support the counterfeit religion.

entered into sociopolitical/religious alliances—spiritual adultery in God's eyes!—with nations that worshipped idols.

"They say," the prophet Jeremiah wrote, recording God's words, "If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to Me, says the Lord" (Jer. 3:1).

Verses 8-10 states, "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks [idols]. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly, says the Lord." (Also read Isaiah 50:1 and 54:4-8.)

God used the ancient Assyrians to conquer and deport en masse the house of Israel into national slavery for their habitual unfaithfulness. The Babylonian Empire did the same to Judah decades later, but the Jews were eventually allowed to return to their homeland.

Only upon Jesus' death was He legally free to marry another. When He returns to establish God's kingdom on the Earth, Christ will marry *spiritual* Israel, His Church (Rev. 19:7-17).

"I Change Not!"

Again, the Bible does not give explicit details of Jesus' life from age 12 to the start of His ministry. But piecing together Scripture, history and the customs and practices of the day provides a fuller and better picture of what Christ must have been like as a youth and young adult.

This we do know: Jesus Christ and the Word are the same (John 1:1-2, 14). He declares, "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). He is "the same yesterday, and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The God of the Old Testament laughed, grieved (Gen. 6:5-6), was brokenhearted (Ezek. 6:9). He felt anger, suffered long with the failing of others, was gentle, astonished by men's behavior (Jer. 32:32-35; I Kings 21:25-29), and was forgiving.

Jesus lived His physical life in the same manner.

The Ancient World

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit, they symbolically declared that they and their descendants would reject God—His laws, judgments, instruction and direction—and decide for themselves how to live. Subsequently, man has devised every imaginable form of government, from dictatorships to democratic republics, and varying systems of education, religion, financial institutions, among others—all failing miserably, to one degree or another.

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23).

"There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25).

Only one government, only one administration of laws and judgment can be fairly executed with perfect impartiality: the kingdom of God, which is the supreme government of God ruled and administered by Jesus Christ and those who will have qualified, in this lifetime, to rule under Him.

Upon His First Coming, Jesus was to live a perfect, sinless life as a flesh-and-blood human being, thus becoming the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. And Christ was to use His earthly ministry to preach the gospel—good news—of the kingdom of God, for which He had to qualify, represent the kingdom to the masses, and then build His Church of future leaders and teachers for when God's government would be established to rule all nations.

The world of professing Christianity—of which the overwhelming majority has been saturated with pagan symbols, beliefs, customs and traditions, which Jesus called, "the commandments" and "tradition of men" (Mark 7:6-9)—focuses also exclusively on Jesus' role as Savior, yet does not comprehend the magnitude of, and therefore ignores, Christ's *other* pivotal role: that of conquering King of God's soon-coming government.

Jesus was born into an ancient world of tyranny and political upheaval, widespread religious confusion and superstition, social injustices, pagan cultural influences and endless philosophies. God chose the precise timing of Jesus' First Coming for a specific purpose, which this chapter will make clear.

A Brief History of Palestine

Let's get the "big picture" of the world into which Jesus was born. We will start with a brief history of Palestine.

Back in the time of Moses, God delivered the ancient Israelites from slavery in Egypt and brought them into Canaan, the Promised Land. Nearly all people think the Jews and Israelites were the same. In reality, all Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. In fact, most are not. Similarly, all Pennsylvanians are Americans, but not all Americans are Pennsylvanians.

The nation of Israel consisted of 13 tribes, each of which had its own territory in the Promised Land (except for Levi, a tribe of priests and tabernacle workers, to whom God gave a certain number of cities, instead of farmland; these Levitical cities were scattered throughout Israel). From the time of Joshua, who succeeded Moses, to the reign of King Solomon, son of David and Israel's third king, the 13 tribes were united in one kingdom.

But this changed soon after Solomon's death. Ten of the tribes broke away and formed their own kingdom: the house of Israel, with Samaria as its capital. The remaining tribes—Judah, Benjamin and largely Levi, with remnants of Simeon and others—formed the house of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem.

Both Israel and Judah had their own kings and their own religions, though Judah sometimes followed its sister nation's proclivity to worship the false gods of the surrounding nations. At times, Israel and Judah were at war—in fact, the first time the phrase "the Jews" is mentioned in Scripture, God's Word records that the Israelites (allied with Syria) were at war with them (II Kings 16:5-6). At other times, Israel and Judah either worked together toward a common goal,

or stayed out of each other's affairs altogether. They were separate nations, yet the peoples of both kingdoms were Israelites.

After centuries of tolerating an endless cycle of national obedience, then disobedience, followed by divine punishment, in turn followed by repentance, back to obedience, and then disobedience, God's patience wore out. He used the ancient Assyrians—an empire infamous for waging war and committing the severest acts of brutality—to invade and conquer the house of Israel. The Assyrians enslaved Israel and deported the people en masse to Assyria and other foreign lands. The ten tribes of Israel lost their national identity and melted into the pages of history. To this day, their modern descendants mistakenly believe they are Gentiles, not realizing that the abundant national wealth, prosperity and international influence they have long enjoyed are the result of God fulfilling His promise to Abraham (Gen. 17:1-8).

Judah No Different

For the most part, the house of Judah did not learn the lesson of Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness. The ancient Jews went back and forth, from worshipping God to serving idols, and back again. Theirs was a religious mixture of seemingly pious worship toward the Creator, yet underneath the façade was every abomination imaginable. It was religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness at its worst.

And so, 134 years after the overthrow of the kingdom of Israel, God sent a special punishing tool for Judah: Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. In 587 BC, the Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem, plundered Solomon's Temple—originally a grand house of worship for the true God—and carried the people into captivity to Babylon, where the Jews remained for the next 70 years.

They were eventually permitted to return to their homeland and rebuild a second Temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). After this restoration period, the Jews were ruled by Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and then by high priests, assisted by the Sanhedrin (a council of priests, scribes and elders).

Upon his death in 323 BC, Alexander the Great's vast empire was divided between his four generals. Egypt, Arabia, Palestine (formerly Canaan) and Coele-Syria came to be controlled by Ptolemy Lagus, who carried away nearly 100,000 of Jerusalem's inhabitants into Egypt. Though Ptolemy allowed the Jews certain privileges, they suffered cruelty and oppression from Ptolemy's successors, and later from the successive rulers of Syria. This led to a revolt under

the Maccabees (163 BC), who reclaimed Jerusalem and the Second Temple (which the Hellenistic Syrians used to worship Zeus), and eventually gained national independence for the Jews.

But their national freedom and self-government came to an end in 68 BC, when Pompey the Great seized Palestine and turned it into a province of the burgeoning Roman Empire. About 25 years later, the Jews revolted against the Roman yoke, only to be taken over by Herod the Great, who served Rome. At around 20 BC, Herod began a mass renovation project, rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring and expanding the Temple. Under Herod's rule and with Rome's approval, Palestine was divided into four provinces: Judea (in the south), Samaria (in the middle region), Galilee (the north) and Perea (which lay east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea).

The Roman Empire and the Hellenistic World

By the time Jesus was born, the Roman Empire dominated nearly all the lands that bordered the Mediterranean Sea. As the empire continued to conquer territories and expand its borders over the generations, the Jews spread throughout the Roman and Parthian empires.

Rome had legions stationed in Syria, which were sent to Judea to squash a revolt against the Herodians that arose upon the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. As he had done with Herod, Augustus Caesar decided to control Palestine through a client king, a ruler who maintained order at his own personal expense. However, instead of having just one king over such a large territory, the emperor divided the province into regions among Herod's surviving sons. Archelaus, the heir, received rulership over Judea, Samaria and Idumaea; however, Augustus removed him from power in AD 6, and transformed Judea into a larger Roman province, called Iudaea, coming under direct Roman rule.

Rome's influence was felt throughout Palestine. Roman troops were garrisoned in Jerusalem and in other parts of the region. The people were heavily taxed. And with the empire came the spread of the Greek language and culture (plays, epic poems and philosophies pondering ethics, morality, the nature of reality, of God, and other thoughts of human reasoning). The empire consisted of peoples of foreign cultures, religions and languages who spoke and wrote Greek, akin to the way English is used today as an unofficial international language.

While Rome was quick to squash even the hint of rebellion and did not hesitate to use oppression to achieve its goals, Roman officials did

permit the Jewish peoples certain liberties. For example, while inhabitants of other provinces served in their auxiliary forces, the Jews did not. And instead of having to participate in the imperial cult—the worship of dead emperors—the Jews were allowed to substitute a daily sacrifice in the Temple on behalf of the emperor and the Romans.

Nevertheless, Rome did on occasion try to introduce images of its emperors in Jerusalem—even in the Temple. These attempts were always met with staunch resistance, fueled by religious fervor. Though they disagreed among themselves religiously, socially and politically, the Jews were determined to honor no other deity but the God of the Torah.

Ironically, the God they *claimed* to fear and worship was born among them—Jesus Christ—but they rejected Him and His teachings.

Samaritans and Other Gentiles

Among the inhabitants of Palestine were the Samaritans. When the Assyrian Empire conquered the house of Israel and deported them from Samaria, Assyria replaced the ten tribes with a mixed group of foreigners brought in from Babylon and other faraway lands. This mixed group settled into the largely empty cities of Samaria and racially integrated with the remnant of Israelites who still lived in the land. The inhabitants—who came to be called Samaritans—largely adopted a pseudo-religion, mixing the Old Testament practices of worshipping Israel's God with the spiritual poison of pagan customs and traditions.

The Jews, upon returning to their homeland after being exiled in Babylon, refused the Samaritans' offer of help in rebuilding the Temple. Subsequently, hostility arose between the two, with the Samaritans building a rival temple at Mount Gerizim (which was later destroyed), and then at Shechem. Their bitter rivalry continued through the years, and was evident during Christ's earthly ministry, "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9).

In Old Testament times, Gentiles were simply viewed as non-Israelites, and were not particularly despised for not having descended from Jacob (Israel). In fact, as soon as God delivered to Israel the Ten Commandments, He also proclaimed statutes—laws that expounded upon the commandments in addressing various areas of life. Among these, God instructed His people, "You shall neither vex a stranger [foreigner], nor oppress him" (Ex. 22:21) and "you shall not oppress a stranger: for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9).

As long as foreigners lived peaceably among the Israelites, were willing to observe God's laws, and rejected the worship of idols and other pagan practices, God expected His people to treat the "strangers" among them with equity and justice.

However, after having suffered the destruction of Solomon's Temple, seven decades of Babylonian exile, then ongoing persecution from foreigners who wanted to blot out their religion and Hellenize them, the Jews came to use the term "Gentile" with contempt. By New Testament times, they saw Gentiles as religiously unclean—therefore, it was considered wrong to associate or be friends with them. While Gentiles could become proselytes of the Judaic faith, they could not be full members. Consequently, there was no love lost among the Greeks and Romans for the Jewish peoples.

Herod Rebuilds the Temple

Herod the Great was a morally corrupt and ruthless client king for Rome, who did not hesitate to murder any enemies (both real and perceived) he thought might threaten his reign. He even had members of his own family put to death. This is the Herod who, in an effort to kill the Christ Child, "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16). Herod was widely despised all throughout his 37 years of rule—and long after his death.

On the other hand, the Jews (begrudgingly) appreciated the ambitious public works projects he initiated throughout Palestine, such as the great amphitheater in Caesarea and his refurbishing of Jerusalem's Second Temple, expanding it on a monumental scale. This grand renovation project, which was to rival the greatest man-made wonders of the world, started in 20 BC and lasted more than 80 years.

Eight decades of building the Temple served to grow the local economy, as it employed workmen from construction and artisan guilds. It also served to unify the people in worshipping God (as opposed to the Greeks, Romans and other Gentiles honoring hundreds of idols and other false gods).

Yet the Temple also polarized the Jews, who were divided along religious and sociopolitical lines.

"The building itself was very small. The actual building of the Temple could fit inside the infield of any baseball stadium. However, the large structure all around it, the large plaza, the porticos, the col-

umns, the staircases, all of that, were built up by Herod the Great on a monumental scale, filling up, I think something like ten football fields…So we have then a very large, very conspicuous, grandiose, grand…structure in the center of Jerusalem which attracted pilgrims from near and far, both Jews and gentile" ("From Jesus to Christ," *PBS*, Shaye I.D. Cohen, Samuel Ungerleider Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies, Brown University).

The Temple was a center of constant activity. It was operated by priests, who roasted animal sacrifices, splattered blood on the corners of the altar, and performed other religious rituals. Gentiles were provided a reserved area where they could worship God and bring offerings, which Levitical priests offered on their behalf, but only the chief priest could enter the innermost areas of the Temple. The Levites, who assisted the priests, chanted verses from the book of Psalms. Every Sabbath, the Jews visited the Temple to listen to a reading of the Torah. Three seasons a year (Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost every spring, and the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn), Jerusalem overflowed with visitors who had journeyed from the furthermost parts of the empire. Roman troops stationed in the region were brought in for crowd control and to maintain order. Hundreds of thousands of worshippers for Passover meant that tens of thousands of lambs needed to be properly selected and slaughtered. As a result, a rotation of extra priests was established.

"…the Temple played a large role in a collective religious mentality and a collective religion of the people, as a whole. Everybody realized that this was the one most sacred place on earth, the one place on earth where somehow heaven and earth meet, where somehow there is a telephone connection, perhaps we would say, between heaven and earth, where the earth rises up and heavens somehow descend just enough, that they just touch" (ibid.).

It should be briefly noted that three other Herods are mentioned in the Bible: Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa I and Herod Agrippa II. They are sometimes confused.

Herod Antipas, mentioned in Matthew 14, Mark 6 and Luke 23, was one of the many sons of Herod the Great. He became tetrarch (local governor) over Galilee and Peraea, and ruled from about 4 BC until AD 39. This was the Herod who ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded at the insistence of Herodias his brother's wife (Matt. 14:3-11). He also mocked Christ during His trial (Luke 23:11).

Herod Agrippa I (discussed in Acts 12) was the grandson of Herod the Great, and nephew of Herod Antipas. He ruled from 37 to 44 AD as king over the entire region. He gradually gained control

over the area Herod the Great had previously ruled by scheming against his own relatives with help from Emperor Caligula, who actually freed him from prison to help him consolidate power. This Herod killed James, the brother of John, with the sword (Acts 12:2). Acts 12:23 reveals his death was caused by being eaten of worms.

Herod Agrippa II, mentioned in Acts 25 and 26, began his reign in AD 44 and continued for a number of decades (scholars disagree on the actual date of his death). This was the Herod before whom the apostle Paul made his defense in about AD 58. Of all the Herods, Agrippa II was the most humane.

Religious Sects of the Day

Several competing religious and political factions existed among the Jewish peoples, with each movement, party or school of thought promoting its own agenda. The Bible mentions three major factions: the scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees and (by implication) the Zealots.

• **Scribes and Pharisees:** The Pharisees were considered religious scholars and experts in meticulously observing and interpreting the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) and oral laws.

Working with them were the scribes. In the days of the Old Testament, scribes held various offices in conducting the kingdom's public affairs. They served as secretaries of state, preparing and issuing decrees by the king's authority. Scribes were also writers for important figures, such as a prophet. After the Babylonian exile, they wrote multiple copies of the Law that were used to teach the people in exile.

The scribes and the Pharisees added their traditions to God's laws—their own interpretation of how to, in effect, be even more "righteous" toward God, attempting to avoid a repeat of suffering national captivity in foreign lands. Yet these manmade traditions needlessly burdened the people with exacting and extreme rules of "do's" and "don'ts."

In Mark, chapter 7, the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for not ceremoniously washing their hands before eating: "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders" (vs. 3).

When they questioned Christ about why His students "failed" to live up to tradition, He answered, "Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit *in vain do they worship Me,*

teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men" (vs. 6-8).

Jesus added that they made "the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you" (vs. 13).

Throughout Matthew 23, Christ called the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites," "blind guides," "fools and blind," "serpents" and a "generation of vipers." He said that, in meticulously focusing on the smaller matters of the Law, they "have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (vs. 23).

Christ inspired the apostle James to write, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jms. 1:27). God's Law is based on love—in fact, "he that loves another has fulfilled the law…therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8, 10).

But the Pharisees and scribes—rather than teaching the people to love God and neighbor by observing the Law—sought to "improve" the laws of God by adding precise, black-and-white restrictions for virtually every scenario. These offered no room for mercy and forgiveness, only burden.

• **Sadducees:** Though also religious, the Sadducees were more like a sociopolitical party, consisting of aristocracy and priests who dominated the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's "supreme court," or council. They observed only the Torah, and thus did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, as taught in the other books of the Old Testament. As priests, they were responsible for operating the Temple.

• **Zealots:** These were a radical sect of terrorist-subversives who originated with Judas the Galilean: "After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed" (Acts 5:37). The Zealots were devoted to ending Roman rule, and refused to pay tribute to Rome, staunchly believing this violated the principle that God was the only king of Israel. In rebelling against the Romans, the Zealots were scattered and became bandits roaming the remote countryside.

Anticipating the Messiah

The Jews in the first centuries BC and AD were very familiar with Old Testament prophecies that describe a coming "Messianic Age" and

looked forward to their fulfillment with eager expectation. They well understood that the Messiah would usher in a time unlike any other.

Under years of Roman occupation, the Jews expected the Christ to arrive and free them from Rome's rule. Conditions for the common Jew were harsh. Peasants had to depend on crops for survival. Not only did they need enough to last until the next harvest, they also needed extra grain to seed the next round of crops, adequate food for their livestock, food to use in trading, and food for religious rituals and celebrations. Many found it difficult to meet these needs.

Making matters more difficult, the Roman government demanded more, taxing the peasants as much as 40% of what they produced. This was in addition to the 10% (tithe) they paid to the Temple. Many peasant families would borrow to survive, which often led to a loss of their land and becoming sharecroppers on the very land they had once owned.

However, not paying tribute was also an undesirable option, as the Roman government viewed this as rebellion and would not hesitate to use military force. On occasion, during times of war the Romans would also pull resources from those under their authority. They could demand additional food from the Jewish province to help other areas fight invaders.

All of this amounted to an impossible situation for the Jews. But the only options left were to (A) accept the oppression of the Romans, or (B) reject it and become enemies of the empire, which would lead to war.

Thus, the idea of one coming to end the tyranny became ever more present in the minds of most Jews. Conditions were ripe for the Christ's arrival. This led to a number of self-proclaimed false christs rising up and convincing some they were in fact the long-awaited deliverer of Israel, leading insurrections against the Roman government. But they were nothing more than imposters, and all of them failed in their self-appointed missions.

It is in this Messiah-hopeful environment that Jesus was born, in 4 BC. But it wasn't until He reached the age of 30 that He began to preach to the masses, in 27 AD. Over the course of His three-and-a-half-year ministry, only a tiny few believed His claim to being the long-awaited Christ.

Why?

Misinterpreting Old Testament Prophecies

Numerous times throughout His ministry, Jesus informed others that He was the Christ, though usually in a subtle fashion. Most rejected

His claim, often citing Old Testament scriptures as proof He could not be the coming Messiah. This rejection generally stemmed from Jewish tradition or from misinterpreting the scriptures.

The first account of this is found in the book of Luke. Just after His baptism and being tempted by Satan in the wilderness for 40 days, Jesus entered a synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath and read from the book of Isaiah:

"And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:17-19).

When He finished reading these scriptures, Jesus sat down, with everyone in the synagogue looking curiously at Him. Then He said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

Those present were no doubt familiar with this prophecy in Isaiah, and that it was one the Christ would fulfill. The people in the synagogue marveled at His words, asking, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). In other words, "How could Jesus of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, possibly be the Christ? We have known Him since He was a little boy. This can't be the Christ." Jesus simply did not fit their profile of the Messiah.

A common thought was that the Christ would sort of "magically appear." Many believed that, after His birth, Christ would hide Himself from the masses for a considerable amount of time. Thus when He would begin to preach, no one would know His background.

Notice John 7:27: "Howbeit we know this Man whence [from where] He is: but when Christ comes, no man knows whence [from where] He is." This thinking can be found in a common Jewish proverb of the time: "Three things come unexpectedly: (1) a thing found by chance; (2) the sting of a scorpion; and (3) the Messiah." Since many knew Jesus' parents and even knew Him as a boy, in their minds, He could not possibly be the Christ.

Consider in the book of John another example of why Jesus was rejected. There He explained that He would be "lifted up from the earth," or crucified (12:32). This idea of the Christ being executed in this manner perplexed some, as they believed the Messiah would live forever: "We have heard out of the law that Christ abides for ever: and how say you, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (12:34).

The Old Testament, which was the only Scripture available during the time of Jesus, nowhere states that the Christ would not die. In reality, it clearly states the opposite, which we will soon see.

However, there are prophecies that show the Christ's *reign*—and His *kingdom*—will endure forever, as found in Daniel chapter 7: "And there was given Him [the Christ] dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an *everlasting dominion*, *which shall not pass away*, and His kingdom that which *shall not be destroyed*" (vs. 14).

Many read these and other scriptures and correctly noticed that the Messiah's kingdom was to last forever. They then concluded that, once He appeared, He could not possibly die. To them, His death would appear to directly contradict God's Word.

Messiah's Death Foretold Long Ago

Yet Jesus' death did not conflict with Scripture. In fact, it was clearly foretold! Perhaps more than any other series of verses, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah unmistakably identifies that the Christ was to be killed—and for a reason.

The chapter opens by asking, "Who has believed our report?" Certainly few have believed what God has spoken through the prophets, and ancient Israel had a track record of not heeding their words. It is fitting that this chapter on the Christ opens with this question, as many have not believed this report.

Verse 2 describes there would be nothing significant about the Christ's appearance. He would look quite ordinary (as we saw earlier), and there would be nothing beautiful about Him. Verse 3 indicates He would be despised and rejected, and would not be noted as having any value. These verses have been confirmed by history. Jesus was not of noble appearance and was despised and rejected—to the point of being executed.

Verses 5 and 6 explain exactly why Christ, as Savior, had to suffer: "He was wounded for *our transgressions* [sins], He was bruised for *our iniquities* [sins]: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the *iniquity* [sin] of us all."

Before coming later as a conquering King, the Christ had to first take mankind's sins—both physical and spiritual—upon Himself (at His First Coming). This happened when Jesus was severely beaten ("wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniqui-

ties") and crucified. And right before dying on the stake, the Father forsook Jesus (Matt. 27:46), as at that point He took on the sins of humanity, and thus was counted as sin—of which the Father can have no part.

Amazingly, Jesus was viewed by the Jews as having been rejected by God because He was *not* the Christ. They counted Him as cursed and afflicted by God because of what He did—what He taught. The people did not comprehend that Jesus' death was necessary. Notice Isaiah 53:4: "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: *yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*."

The reality was that "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief" for "an offering for sin" (vs. 10). "He [the Father] shall see of the travail of His [the Christ's] soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities" (vs. 11).

God was pleased to bruise Jesus Christ because it was a necessary part of His overall plan for mankind. If this had not happened, man would have no hope of salvation.

The chapter concludes, "Therefore will I [the Father] divide Him [Jesus Christ] a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He has poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (vs. 12).

Because Jesus was willing to bear "the sin of many," the Father will provide Him an everlasting kingdom—a divine government that will bring true justice and world peace. Clearly, however, this government has not arrived. This is perhaps the major reason many rejected Jesus as the Christ.

In the eyes of the first-century Jews, Jesus failed to accomplish what they expected the Christ to do—destroy every evil, as well as all of their enemies (the Romans), and establish an eternal kingdom, with Israel as the preeminent nation in the world. The Jews believed that the Christ would deliver them from Roman bondage and set up a kingdom where they would be the rulers. Although they could read the prophecies in Isaiah describing a suffering Christ who would be persecuted and executed, they instead chose to focus on prophecies addressing His glorious victories and time of world peace, accompanying many of them. Since Jesus did not at that time come as the long-awaited conquering King, He was rejected. He "failed" to live up to the people's expectations of the Messiah. As stated in John chapter 1, "He came unto His own [people], and His own received Him not" (vs. 11).

To this day, followers of Judaism reject Jesus as the Christ, citing similar reasons as their first-century counterparts.

Viewed as Nothing New

In the volatile environment of Roman tyranny, religious hypocrisy, turmoil and falsehood, pagan influences of culture, philosophies and religions, racial tensions and rampant injustice, God chose to have His Son born into the world.

During His three-and-a-half-year ministry, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God to the masses, and taught a core group of disciples who would go on to become apostles, but also evangelists and other ministers, as well as deacons and deaconesses, along with many faithful, diligent lay members who formed the Church of God. Through His ministers, Christ's gospel would be spread from city to city, across regions and provinces throughout the Roman Empire.

Rome forbade the emergence of new religions under its rule. But to non-Jews, who worshipped many "gods," Christianity and Judaism seemed the same. The Jewish peoples had migrated and settled in Gentile areas across the ever-expanding empire; therefore, Roman provinces had grown accustomed to having citizens among them who worshipped only one God. By the time Rome realized that Christianity and Judaism were different, it was too late—Christians could be found living in the emperor's household.

Suppose the Messiah had appeared during a time when the Mediterranean world was divided into separate, independent kingdoms, each with its own ruler. In such a scenario, the gospel would have gone no farther than Judea. Gentile kingdoms would have shut their borders to a religion that teaches that the governments, systems, societies and religions of men will be replaced by the divine government of God!

But the Roman Empire, to satisfy the peoples they subjugated, permitted their subjects to continue worshipping the endless gods of their particular lands, as long as this did not interfere with Roman affairs or supplant loyalty to the emperor.

Also, Rome interconnected the kingdoms they conquered with highways that still exist today—roads that Christ's apostles, ministers and other servants used to spread the true gospel and establish congregations in city after city.

The timing of Jesus Christ's First Coming—which led to establishing the small, but faithful, Church that survived the past 2,000 years and now preaches to all nations the same gospel message Christ taught—was perfect.

Jesus' Ministry Begins

John the Baptist spent his short ministry traveling throughout the region preaching a baptism for repentance—that is, a 180-degree change in one's thinking and conduct. Throngs of people, attracted by his message, journeyed into the wilderness to be baptized and forgiven of their sins.

John's preaching drew a following large enough to attract the attention of the religious leaders of the day. The Temple priests and Levites went out to question him, asking if he were the Messiah. Some may have feared he was just another terrorist leader in the making, someone who would cause trouble and bring the wrath of Rome upon the land.

John's answer was plain: "I am not the Christ."

When pressed further to explain who he was, John replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, as written in the book of Isaiah: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low. And the crooked will be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth. And all mankind will see the salvation of God.'"

John the Baptist had come "in the power and spirit of Elijah" to proclaim the First Coming of Christ's arrival. Speaking of Christ, John declared, "There cometh One mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7).

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

God's Word plainly teaches that baptism must be preceded by repentance (Acts 2:38) and belief (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31, 33). Upon repentance, the blood of Christ cleanses one of past sins. Baptism involves being entirely submerged underwater as a symbol of acknowledging one's sins. When baptized, one figuratively dies with Jesus, our Savior, in a "watery grave"—which typifies the death of the old self and the emergence of a new person with a new life. Rising out of that "grave" is symbolic of the resurrection of the dead; we live a new (righteous) life through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit actively at work within us (Rom. 6:4; 8:9; Gal. 2:20).

The New Testament is not the first place baptism is found in the Bible. Rather, God used this symbol thousands of years before John the Baptist was born. Noah's deliverance from the Flood—a watery grave for the sinful world—represented deliverance from the penalty of sin through baptism (I Peter 3:20-21). And Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea was also considered a type of Christian baptism (I Cor. 10:1-2). In both events, at the Flood of Noah's time and at the Red Sea, God miraculously delivered His people who looked to and trusted in His deliverance.

Water baptism also requires faith in Christ—faith in His sacrifice, which wipes clear the past sins of the repentant believer. Noah acted on his faith in managing the giant project of building the ark. Moses instructed Israel to move forward to the sea and obeyed God's instruction to lift up his rod to cause the sea to divide. The truly repentant believer must also act in faith, trusting in the deliverance of Christ to cover his sins and "lift him up" to a new life led by the Holy Spirit. An active, living faith is required.

When the time came for Jesus to start His ministry, John the Baptist was told how he was to recognize the Christ when he would baptize Him at a future time. The baptism of John symbolized the outward expression of sincere genuine repentance of those who would be convicted by the message he preached. Luke 1:77 states John the Baptist came "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." His ministry focused on the first step of salvation, preparing a people for Christ's arrival. They did not receive the Holy Spirit; Jesus had not yet been resurrected and glorified so He could not send forth the Spirit according to God's Plan (John 7:39).

Jesus came to His cousin to be baptized, but John was hesitant. He said to Jesus, "I have need to be baptized of You, and come You

to me?" (Matt. 3:13-14). Christ never sinned—never broke any of God's laws. One of the purposes of His earthly ministry was to set the example for those whom God the Father might call into the difficult long-life journey of Christianity. This is why Jesus permitted Himself to be baptized. Also, His baptism foreshadowed an event that would occur three and a half years later: His death and resurrection.

A Titanic Battle for Rulership

As soon as He was baptized and received His Father's approval—"You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11)—Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, went into the wilderness, where He "fasted forty days and forty nights" (Matt. 4:1-2).

Matthew 4 and Luke 4 record in detail a monumental battle of wills between Jesus Christ and Satan the devil. The two engaged in a very real outright spiritual war to determine who would ultimately rule the Earth and reign over all nations, kingdoms and governments!

To spiritually prepare for this great test, Jesus humbled Himself through fasting, denying His body food and drink for 40 days. Contrary to hunger strikes, used throughout history to gain sympathy from the public and essentially extort the powers-that-be to give in to one's demands, fasting is different. It is not a method to somehow "twist God's arm" into rendering a favorable decision, or impress Him with one's "righteousness," or gain His sympathy. Fasting—when done in the right way, for the right purpose—is used to lower the self in one's own eyes, to see himself as God sees him.

The Bible states, "The heart [carnal mind] is deceitful above all things, and is desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Therefore, man cannot "walk to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23) through life, making decisions that "seem right unto a man, but the end therefore are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25), for "all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes" (vs. 2).

When our stomachs are empty and begin to growl, we then realize that life is temporary. "My days are like a shadow that declines," Psalm 102:11 states, "and I am withered like grass." King David wrote, "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Psa. 103:15-16).

When compared to the Great God of the universe, "the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity" (Isa. 57:15), this physical, chemical existence humans call life is less than a breath. While God has need of nothing, our physical strength and bodily existence relies on whether

we eat. Fasting—denying the body food and drink for at least 24 hours—reminds us we are less than nothing in the grand scheme of things, and that we need our Maker and Sustainer to provide for all our necessities. This humble mindset permits one to be teachable and willing to suppress his will to readily receive God's direction.

When Satan confronted Christ in the wilderness, the first thing he did was try to tempt Jesus into eating, thus breaking His fast (Matt. 4:3). Yet by making Himself physically weak, Christ actually strengthened Himself spiritually. The devil tried to appeal to Jesus' ego by saying, "IF you be the Son of God"—in other words, "Prove it!" But instead of relying upon Himself, Jesus wielded the "sword of the spirit" (Eph. 6:17)—that is, He recalled the Holy Scriptures in His mind—and said, "It is written, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*" (Matt. 4:4), quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.

But Satan was not ready to give up the battle. Matthew 4 records that he set Christ on a pinnacle of the Temple, and then quoted Scripture. Again, trying to inflate Jesus' ego, the devil said, "IF You be the Son of God, cast Yourself down: for it is written, *He shall give His angels charge concerning You: and in their hands they shall bear You up, lest at any time You dash Your foot against a stone*" (vs. 6).

Yes, the devil can read the Bible. Satan is the master at misusing Scripture to confuse and deceive billions into blindly accepting easily disprovable false doctrines. He has long used false ministers as his human agents to carry out mass deception—religious leaders who *seem* to be sincere and truthful, but God's Word calls them "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12, taking the passage out of context. Jesus understood this, and answered with God's Word rather than trusting in Himself. "It is written again," He said, "*You shall not tempt the Lord Your God*" (Matt. 4:7), quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.

One Last Attempt

The devil tried to tempt Jesus one more time. He took Him up to a high mountain and, perhaps primarily through a vision, "showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and said unto Him, All these things will I give You, IF You will fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8-9).

This epic battle was about rulership. Satan knew Christ was destined to establish God's government on Earth and rule all nations. In this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4) of man's 6,000-year history, the nations, kingdoms, governments, laws, practices, traditions, systems, cultures and societies are influenced by and belong to "the great dragon…that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). As the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), the devil broadcasts wrong attitudes, thoughts and emotions, which translate into perverse language and conduct in the lives of an unsuspecting humanity.

Satan's Origin

Before the universe existed, God created hundreds of millions of angels. Like human beings, God granted them free moral agency, permitting the angels the capacity to decide and choose for themselves whether they will obey Him.

God then created all the stars, planets, moons and galaxies in the vast and expanding universe. Millions of these spirit beings sang for joy, especially when God created the Earth (Job 38:7), for they knew it would be handed to a large number of all the angels as part of a very special assignment. They were to live on the Earth, led by the archangel Lucifer, and take special care of it. If they succeeded, they would eventually be given the entire universe to rule under God.

At first, the angels were happy about their assignment. They wanted to do all they could to make the world a beautiful garden paradise of peaceful meadows, green forests, sandy beaches and sparkling oceans. But as time passed (the Bible does not say how long; it may have taken millions, even billions, of years), something changed.

It all began with Lucifer. Full of wisdom and beauty, he was the most brilliant, perfect being God had ever created (Ezek. 28:11-14). For a while, Lucifer obediently carried out God's commands and government on the Earth. But, at some point, he allowed a wrong thought or attitude to enter his mind. Instead of removing it and replacing it with right thoughts, Lucifer allowed even more wrong ideas and feelings to guide and control his mind. He soon became full of pride (vs. 15).

Instead of being grateful for the assignment God gave him, Lucifer had become bitter and angry. He had come to believe that he deserved more, that God was somehow "limiting" him, not putting his "enormous talents" to better use (and in the process, forgot that his talents came from God in the first place). Lucifer wanted more power, more responsibility, more "respect"—and he wanted it his way, not God's.

Lucifer's mind corrupted to the point he believed he knew better than his Maker—and that he was greater than God! Eventually, Lucifer believed he should BE God! He reasoned that he needed to take God's place and remove Him from His heavenly throne (Isa. 14:12-14).

Lucifer's perverse and twisted thoughts and attitudes led him to sin—to break God's spiritual laws of love and outgoing concern for others (I John 3:4; Rom. 7:12-14). Thus, he became God's enemy. Through lies and deception, Lucifer convinced angels around him to believe his way was right and that God's ways were unfair and unjust. In turn, those angels convinced others of the same lies, eventually twisting the minds of all the angels on the Earth—many of the spirit beings that God created rebelled against their Creator (Rev. 12:4; Job 4:18).

Led by Lucifer, the rebellious angels—now demons—invaded heaven to take over God's throne. But God—armed with the limitless power of His Holy Spirit, and backed by many loyal angels—squashed the invasion. He cast the evil spirits back to the Earth, and changed Lucifer's name, which means "morning star" or "shining one," to Satan the devil, which means "adversary," "accuser" and "slanderer" (Ezek. 28:11-19). (Additional facts and description of Lucifer's rebellion are contained in others of our books and booklets.)

World Under Satan

Ever since he influenced Adam and Eve to reject God's rule over them, and subsequently their descendants, Satan and his demons have had dominion over mankind's kingdoms, governments and systems. This world belongs to the devil—and man's carnal nature, which is naturally hostile to God and His laws (Rom. 8:7), is actually Satan's nature!

The devil knows that His days as ruler over this perverse, rebellious, anti-God age are numbered. Satan, through Herod, tried to destroy Jesus when He was just a babe. As you will read in this book, the devil on many occasions tried to use his human agents to kill Christ before it was His time to die. And Satan used all his wiles in Matthew 4 to influence Jesus to go his way—but in all strategies he failed!

When Christ successfully defeated His adversary, He qualified to rule over the kingdom of God, the divine government He will establish on the Earth to produce true and lasting peace, equity and prosperity for all!

Calling Disciples

Contrary to popular teaching among many churches today, it is God the Father, not Christ, who calls people to come into the Christian way of life (John 6:44). No one can take upon himself this calling—the decision is up to the Father.

At the start of Jesus' ministry, God called men from different walks of life who would become Christ's disciples (students), in training to become apostles. These 12 men received intense, and extensive, as well as often private, one-on-one training, which would prepare them to take the gospel to other cities, territories, regions, nations and kingdoms.

Peter: Born with the name Simon, Jesus later renamed him Peter, or "Cephas," an Aramaic name equivalent to the Greek *Petros* (Peter), which means "a mass of rock detached from the living rock."

Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were the sons of Jona (Matthew 16:17). He was a fisherman from Bethsaida, a native town on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee, in Galilee (John 1:44, 12:21). Simon, Andrew, James, and John grew up together as childhood friends, and later became fishing partners.

Though they had some level of religious training and were acquainted with prophetic scriptures about the coming of the Messiah, they did not receive any special rabbinical training. This is why Peter and John, when they were brought before the Sanhedrin, seemed to be "unlearned and ignorant men" in the eyes of the leading religious leaders of the land (Acts 4:13).

Galileans had a reputation for being independent, blunt and impetuous. They spoke a peculiar dialect that seemed harsh and backward in Judea.

Peter and the other apostles were called to become "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:18-19), and ordained "to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils [demons]" (Mark 3:14-15).

Andrew: Once a disciple of John the Baptist, Andrew was the first to follow Christ, and introduced Peter to Him (John 1:40). The brothers became Jesus' disciples after John the Baptist was imprisoned (Matt. 4:18-19; Mark 1:16-17).

James: He and his brother John were called *Boanerges*—"sons of thunder"—due to their boldness and intensity. Their parents were Zebedee and Salome. James was called the "greater" (to distinguish him from the other apostle-in-training who had the same name). He also was a fisherman (Matt. 4:21).

John: He may have been younger than his brother James. Zebedee, his father, apparently was a man of some wealth, since he could afford hired servants (Mark 1:20) and possessed at least two fishing vessels (Luke 5:3). John, like his brother and childhood friends, was a fisherman on the Lake of Galilee. He was also influenced by the teachings of John the Baptist, becoming one of his disciples. At John the Baptist's announcement that Jesus was "the Lamb of God," John accepted Christ's offer to follow Him (John 1:36-37). However, John and James temporarily returned to their fishing business before becoming fulltime apostles-in-training (Matt. 4:21; Luke 5:1-11).

Peter, Andrew, James and John grew up together and became business partners in a family fishing venture. Upon being called, they became an "inner circle" around Jesus, to whom He privately shared His thoughts, plans and even a vision following His Return to Earth.

Philip: Also native of Bethsaida (John 1:44; 12:21). He responded to his calling without hesitation, and brought with him Nathanael—or Bartholomew (John 1:45, 46). He may have held a prominent place among the apostles, after Peter, James, John and Andrew (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; John 6:5-7; 12:21, 22; 14:8, 9; Acts 1:13).

Bartholomew: The son of Talemai. Some believe that he and Nathanael (John 1:45-51) were the same person. Bartholomew was friends with Philip before being called.

Matthew: He was a tax collector ("publican") at Capernaum, the son of Alphaeus. He became one of Christ's disciples when Jesus passed the custom-house ("receipt of custom") where Matthew worked for Rome in collecting taxes that the empire levied on the Jews. The people despised publicans, since they willingly worked for the Romans. Matthew was originally called Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27).

Thomas: Also called Didymus (John 11:16; 20:24). Since Thomas is always mentioned along with Matthew, the son of Alphaeus, when the apostles are listed, always followed by James, who was also the son of Alphaeus, there has been speculation that Matthew, Thomas and James were brothers.

James: The son of Alphaeus (or Cleopas), he is known as "James the Less" or "the Little."

Thaddeus: Also called "Lebbaeus" in the book of Matthew.

Simon: Also called "the Canaanite" (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18), derived from the Syriac word *Kanean* or *Kaneniah*, the name of a Jewish sect. He was also called "Simon the Zealot" or "Zelotes"

(Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13); before his calling to become an apostle, Simon was a member of the Zealots, a fanatical sect.

Judas Iscariot: It is possible that the name Iscariot refers to the Judean town of Kerioth (Joshua 15:20-25) or to the sicarii (Jewish nationalist insurrectionists). The Bible also calls this man "Judas… the son of Simon" (John 6:71; 13:2, 26). The treasurer among Jesus and the disciples, he later betrayed Christ (Mark 3:19), and then committed suicide. Matthias replaced him as one of the original apostles shortly after Christ's resurrection.

With the apostles and many other disciples learning from Him, Jesus was planting seed that would sprout into the first century Church on Pentecost AD 31.

Details of Jesus' Ministry

John the Baptist, from prison, sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You He that should come? Or look we for another?" (Luke 7:19-20). They wanted to know whether He was the Messiah foretold to come.

Jesus replied, "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (vs. 22). Christ also "cured many…of evil spirits"—He cast out demons (vs. 21).

But why? How did healing the infirm, resurrecting the dead, freeing the demon-possessed, and other miracles, along with preaching the good news of the kingdom of God to the poor, define Jesus' ministry?

Why Healing?

The four gospel accounts record that Christ performed astounding miracles. Many of His most dramatic were healings. Jesus made the lame walk, gave sight to the blind, healed lepers and other diseased people, and "healed all that were sick" (Matt. 8:16).

The record demonstrates that Jesus healed large numbers of people and captured the attention of constantly growing masses. Yet when Lazarus, a dear friend, was seriously ill, and then died before Christ came to visit him, family and friends grieved. They did not

understand what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

They understood there would come a time when God would resurrect all human beings back to physical life. But they did not grasp that Jesus Christ not only had the power to heal, He possessed the authority to resurrect—not just at His Return, but right then and there while He was in the flesh! (Read verses 38-45.) Jesus *is* God. His power to heal and resurrect came from His Father, who also is God. Together, they are *one* God, *one* divine Family that is adding to its membership begotten children who will one day be born into that Family.

The ability to raise people back to physical life is a type of the ultimate healing to come: the resurrection. Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This was not some emotional religious “high” millions have been deceived into accepting. Christ was talking about being born again *literally*! But not from physical to physical—rather from physical to spirit: “That which is born of the flesh IS FLESH; and that which is born of the Spirit IS SPIRIT” (vs. 6). God’s Word declares, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15:50).

While Jesus’ miraculous power to heal drew crowds, it also drew the ire of the scribes and Pharisees, who felt their status and influence over the people threatened. These spiritually blind religious leaders were much more concerned with elevating their “righteousness” in the eyes of the people than in sincerely serving their needs. Their focus was entirely wrong! They emphasized the importance of meticulously observing the “exactness” of the Law, which they made into a terrible burden with their unscriptural codes of “do’s and don’ts.”

For example, when Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were so focused on observing this weekly holy day *their* way that they failed to see the Law’s *spiritual intent*: Love, first toward God, then neighbor.

God’s Law is not a burden—it is “spiritual” (Rom. 7:14) and “the commandment [is] holy, and just, and good” (vs. 12). Keeping the Ten Commandments expresses selfless, outgoing concern toward God and neighbor, “therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

Remember Adam and Eve. They had two trees set before them—symbolically, two polar opposite ways of life—and the decision of

colossal magnitude. Eating of the Tree of Life meant choosing a lifetime of faithful obedience to God, trusting in the Creator for His divine guidance, direction, knowledge, understanding and wisdom. But eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant rejecting God for guidance, and relying on oneself for judging how to live.

Man ate the fruit of the wrong tree—and for the past 6,000 years humanity has decided for itself what religious practices to embrace, what kinds of food to eat and how often, what types of governments and laws to administer, his own forms of education, whether men would look to God for healing or rely on complex medicines to overcome health issues, etc.

Today, similar to Christ's time, people are sickly, diseased, overworked, overstressed, overweight and physically inactive. Usually people get sick because they have broken God's laws and principles governing good health.

Laws and principles governing…

Communicable diseases: Lev. 5:2-3; 7:19, 21; 11:24-28, 31-40; 13:2-59; 14:2-3, 8-9, 34-48, 54-57; 15:2-13, 16-28, 32-33; 22:4-8; Num. 5:2-4; 9:6, 10; 19:11-16, 22; 31:19-20; Deut. 23:10-11; 24:8

Venereal diseases: Lev. 15:2-13, 16-28, 31-33; 22:4, 6

Quarantining the sick and diseased: Lev. 13:2-5, 31-33, 45-46; 14:2-3, 8, 34-38; 15:19; Num. 5:2-3; 31:11-20; Deut. 23:10-11

Disinfections: Lev. 2:13; 7:19; 11:24-40; 13:6, 34, 47-59; 14:8-9, 34-48, 54-57; 15:2-13, 16-28; Num. 31:19-20, 22-24

Sanitation: Ex. 29:14, 34; Lev. 4:11-12, 21; 6:30; 7:17, 19; 8:17, 32; 9:11; 16:27-28; 19:6; Deut. 23:12-13; Heb. 13:11

Food: Lev. 3:17; 7:15-19, 23-27; 11:2-23, 26-27, 29-43, 46-47; 17:10-15; 19:5-8, 26; 22:8; Deut. 12:16, 20-25; 14:3-21, 26; 15:22-23

Uncleanness: Lev. 20:2-6, 10-21; Deut. 27:20-23

Alcohol consumption: Isa. 5:11, 22; Prov. 23:19-20, 29-35

Disease resulting from gluttony: Num. 11:18-20, 31-33

Overcrowded living conditions: Isa. 5:8

Sometimes people inherit diseases, or the propensity to acquire them, from ancestors who brought on the effects of transgressing against the biblical principles of healthy living.

And in some cases, *no one* is at fault: "And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

"Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: *but that the works of God should be made manifest* [revealed, made obvious] *in him*" (John 9:1-3).

When Christ healed, it drew attention. It caused great numbers to stop and consider the power of God, and to listen to His message. Jesus, as the Lord of the Old Testament, was the One who led ancient Israel through the wilderness into the Promised Land—and therefore the One who announced, "*I am the Lord that heals you*" (Ex. 15:26).

Why Casting Out Demons?

The religious leaders of the day avoided talking about the spirit world, the true nature of angelic beings and evil spirits. Consequently, in ignorance, people involved themselves in the dangerous world of the supernatural, resulting in demonic influences—even demonic possession.

Addressing such cases, Jesus performed healings of the *mind*, casting out demons from people who were possessed. These evil spirits were former angels who joined Lucifer (now Satan) in rebelling against their Creator.

Amazingly, when the Pharisees saw Christ miraculously release someone from the bonds of demonic possession, they actually attributed the power He wielded to the devil (Matt. 12:22-24)!

But Jesus answered, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (vs. 25-26).

Satan is the author of this world's confusion and self-deception among man's governments, religions, institutions, businesses and societies. Yet the devil's kingdom is NOT divided—it is actively working against the Plan of God, which is to ultimately bring salvation to mankind.

Though Jesus qualified to rule God's kingdom, this world—its governments, systems and ways of living—still belong to Satan, who "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9).

Throughout man's history, demons have entered many of the minds of those who have delved into witchcraft, magic and the supernatural; people who opened their thoughts to malicious powers that can drive one to commit unspeakable violence and mayhem. This curiosity with the paranormal is so ingrained within man's nature, the Bible lists witchcraft as one of "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-20).

God's Word also warns "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (vs. 21).

The scribes, Pharisees and other religious leaders were powerless to help the demon-possessed. But Jesus Christ, backed by God the

Father, held real POWER and AUTHORITY. He could command even the most rebellious fallen spirit being to obey His orders.

Another way demons enter the unguarded mind is through wild, unrestrained emotions and attitudes. Notice:

"He that has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"—spiritually defenseless (Prov. 25:28).

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city" (Prov. 16:32).

Man was created *spiritually* incomplete. While animals live without "brainpower" and are "programmed" by instinct, man has power of mind, via the "spirit of man" (I Cor. 2:11), which provides human beings with creative thinking and analysis. Yet the "spirit of man" is limited to comprehending only the physical. Thus, man cannot comprehend spiritual matters, "for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are *spiritually discerned*" (vs. 14).

The Holy Spirit must be actively at work in the mind, converting carnal thoughts, attitudes and desires into spiritual ones. Only then can human beings successfully wage the same lifelong spiritual battles that Christ overcame in the flesh: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds [castles in the mind];) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:3-5).

Those who guard their minds with God's Spirit are able to withstand demonic influences.

Does Satan Have the Power to Heal?

Speaking of ministers who falsely speak in Jesus' name, Paul wrote this: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:13-15).

One of the ways Satan makes his ministers appear as true ministers of God is through demonstrating certain "miracles," including acts of apparent healings. (Also notice Rev. 13:11-14.)

Exodus 5 records that Pharaoh's court magicians were able to perform certain acts similar to the miracles God performed through His servant Moses. These were things that God allowed Satan to do, through Satan's servants, as part of the process of hardening Pharaoh's

heart (Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 14:4), so that Pharaoh would be witness to God's power in delivering Israel from Egypt.

The dramatic public "healings" promoted by many of this world's ministers are the same kind of displays, in which individuals who suffer from various crippling diseases are really bound by a demon. An example of this condition is found in Luke 13:11-13: "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God."

This is an example of an individual who did not have a physical handicap or disease, but whose body was in the grip of a demon. Christ cast the demon from her, and she was restored to a normal condition.

Forward or Backward

Also consider that often, at the climax of many supposed "healings," the individuals involved will seemingly lose self-control and fall backward, usually with people anticipating this and already in place to catch them. But notice the following scriptures:

"And Abram fell on *his face*: and God talked with him…Then Abraham fell upon *his face*…" (Gen. 17:3, 17).

"And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD" (II Chron. 20:18).

"And He [Christ] went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed…" (Matt. 26:39).

"…and so falling down on his face he will worship God…" (I Cor. 14:25).

The above scriptures demonstrate that those who come before God's presence to worship Him bow *forward*. Yet other scriptures show that those acting under the influence of a demon tend to fall *backward*. Notice: "As soon then as He [Christ] had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground" (John 18:6).

Why? "And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with You, You Jesus of Nazareth? Are You come to destroy us? I know who You are, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:23-24). Rather than yielding to Jesus, those with demons draw back from His power and authority.

Also note that nowhere in Scripture are people struck on the forehead and knocked backward! God's ministers *anoint*—never strike—the sick. They *lay* hands on them. Think for a moment of the images of today's so-called "faith healers," who are actually performers, swaggering arrogantly before audiences who do not understand what they are witnessing.

Violent, noisy reactions are typical of those who are plagued by demons. Now notice verse 26: "And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him." The Greek word translated "torn" is *sparasso*, meaning a spasmodic contraction. Compare this to the often wild outbursts of "Hallelujah!", "Amen!" and "Thank You Jesus" exclamations, usually accompanied by gyrations or other displays of seemingly uncontrolled behavior, which are standard fare at organized "healing revivals."

Also notice Acts 19:15-16, which records the tragic result of individuals carelessly—or recklessly—invoking Jesus' name to cast out demons. They presumptuously took action, without Jesus Christ's authority.

While Scripture makes clear that Satan does not cast out his demons (Mark 3:23-26), it would certainly work to his advantage (as "the god of this world" – II Cor. 4:4) to make his ministers *appear* to have healing power. Keep in mind that Satan can do whatever God allows him to do. (See Job 1:12; 2:6.) And, as Matthew 12:43-45 shows, if a person possessed by a demon is freed from it, and the person's mind is not receptive to the truth from God's Word, then that demon can return and bring with him "seven [spirits]…more wicked than himself."

Also consider that Satan does not have our best interests at heart (I Pet. 5:8). "He knows that he has but a short time" (Rev. 12:12) before Christ returns. He knows that our ultimate potential, as those made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), is to rule with Christ in the kingdom of God. Not only does the devil have no desire to physically heal anyone of anything (even if he had such power), he also seeks to deceive all people and blind them to God's Purpose: to spiritually heal the entire world.

Most importantly, understand that healing involves—and requires—*the forgiveness of sin*. Satan has no such power!

Faith, Authority and Power

In addition to healings, Jesus performed countless other miracles: turning water into wine, walking on water, calming a raging sea,

etc. These awe-inspiring events were not "parlor tricks" designed to "wow" the masses. They had meaning—purpose—intent. They revealed the awesome, unlimited power of the almighty God! The same power by which all nations will one day submit to Jesus Christ's authority when He establishes God's kingdom on Earth! The very same power that will convert the stubborn, rebellious hearts of men, starting with Israel, then the rest of the world! He also wanted individuals to know they could access such power.

Consider the account of feeding 5,000 men with only a handful of fish and bread. A great multitude of tens of thousands came to hear Jesus teach after they witnessed Him heal the diseased. When His message was finished, Jesus did not send them away hungry; He had His disciples gather all of the food that was available: "five barley loaves, and two small fishes" (John 6:9). The Bible states that there were "about five thousand" men among the multitude (vs. 10), but this does not take into account the women and children who undoubtedly would have accompanied them. Thus, there most likely would have been at least 20,000 people in the crowd that was fed.

Through a miracle, Jesus multiplied the meager amount of food to feed everyone. "When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten" (John 6:12-13).

The people were so amazed by the miracle that Jesus had to remove Himself from their presence, lest "they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king" (vs. 15)—contrary to God's Plan. Note that the account reveals the common thinking of the masses.

But the crowd followed after Christ to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. To the disciples, the throngs of people may have seemed zealous, willing to be taught God's Way. But Christ perceived their true motives: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, You seek Me, not because you saw the miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves, and were filled" (vs. 26).

Their carnal minds focused on the physical. The words of Jesus Christ offered something far greater: "Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which *endures unto everlasting life*, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him has God the Father sealed" (vs. 27).

These tens of thousands sought after Christ, pretending (perhaps even convincing themselves) that they were prepared to receive His teachings. But what Jesus taught was spiritual; the minds of His

listeners were carnal. They could not drink in the words that led to eternal life. Most of Jesus' miracles were conducted to draw attention to God and His kingdom, and to teach that *true* faith is tied to authority and power.

Revealing Account

Take, for example, the account of the Roman centurion whose servant was deathly ill. This Gentile military commander had a good reputation among the Jewish leaders, who petitioned Christ on his behalf. The centurion met Jesus on His way to the man's home, and said, "Lord, trouble not Yourself: for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto You: *but say in a word*, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under AUTHORITY, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it" (Luke 7:6-8).

The reaction?

"When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt. 8:10).

"And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go your way; and as you have believed, so be it done unto you. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (vs. 13).

The centurion understood authority and power. As a commander, he gave orders and expected soldiers under him to obey. Likewise, he responded to the orders of those in authority above him. He believed that Jesus carried authority from God the Father, who empowered His Son to perform miracles. Therefore, the centurion did not need to see Christ actually lay hands on the sickly servant. In the centurion's mind, all he needed to know is whether Christ would exercise His authority to heal—"but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." Real faith understands the connection from authority over miracles to recognition—simple belief—faith—that they will occur.

What Peter Forgot

Let's look at another example: Peter walking on water. As Jesus' disciples were aboard a ship being tossed about in a raging storm at sea, they saw their Master coming toward them, walking on water.

They were so amazed they assumed He was a ghost, and cried out in fear.

Jesus tried to calm them down, saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matt. 14:27).

But Peter was not quite sure. He answered, "Lord, if it be You, bid me come unto You on the water" (vs. 28). He knew that if this was Christ, then He would have the authority to empower Peter to do the humanly impossible.

When Christ said, "Come," Peter stepped out of the ship and locked his eyes on the One who represented the SUPREME AUTHORITY of the God who created the universe and the physical laws that sustain it. Because he had the right focus, Peter's belief in Christ's authority—his faith that Jesus would keep His word to allow him to defy the physical laws of nature—gave him the power to walk on the sea!

But something went wrong. Peter's focus shifted. He allowed the sounds of the howling wind and the splash of ocean spray to distract him. He gradually lost his full attention on the One who represented the government of God…and started to sink into the water.

Peter cried out to Christ to rescue him. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O you of little faith, wherefore did you doubt?"

"From Faith to Faith"

Jesus Christ's miracles were designed to boost people's faith. But Peter, who was unconverted at the time, proved that temporary *human* faith is not enough. Those who follow and obey Christ—Christian soldiers who (II Tim. 2:3-4) wage spiritual warfare against the wiles of the devil, the pulls of the flesh and the cares of Satan's seductive world—must have the faith of Jesus in them.

Paul wrote, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). There is a kind of human faith that all people have at certain times in their lives—but this must eventually be replaced by the permanent faith that comes only by the Spirit of God in converted minds (Gal. 5:22-23; 2:16).

Christ healed many people, and praised their faith—yet none had the Holy Spirit. However, they did have human faith! It takes human faith to believe you will be forgiven by Christ's sacrifice—that God has called you to live His way of life—that you will receive His Spirit—belief that is necessary prior to baptism.

Yet after conversion, a Christian must live by the faith of Jesus Christ in him. He must go "from faith to faith" (Rom. 1:16). And God's servants must *grow* in Christ's faith, a lifelong process.

What Christ Gave the Poor

A common assumption exists today that Jesus both gave money to the poor and taught His followers that they should do the same—that this was the very essence of Christianity. This is simply not true, because the Bible nowhere says either of these things. However, Christ *did* give *something* to the poor, and it had infinitely greater worth than money.

Do you know what it was? Are you aware of what almost no one else knows?

Why do so few understand what the Father commissioned—directed—Christ to do? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to *preach the gospel to the poor*; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

On another occasion, and this was briefly referenced earlier, when John the Baptist was questioning His works, Jesus cited the fulfillment of *this commission*—preaching [giving] the gospel to the poor—as proof He was the Messiah: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5).

On yet another occasion, when the disciples thought that precious spices could have been sold for monies that could have gone to the poor, Jesus actually discouraged this action, and *corrected* their thinking—saying "the poor you have with you always." Again, why are so few aware of this central feature in the thinking of the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible?

Why Preach to the Poor?

Did you know that in a sense there are four versions of you? (1) The way you see yourself; (2) the way others see you; (3) the way God sees you; and (4) the person that God sees you can become IF you submit to His will and allow Him to develop within you His perfect, holy, righteous character.

The vast majority of people see themselves as being "basically good"—but that is not how God sees humanity: "Verily every man

at his *best state* is altogether VANITY. Surely every man walks in a vain show" (Psa. 39:5-6).

We saw that God makes clear that "ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). No matter how noble, no matter how humble or sincere people may seem, "There is NONE righteous, no, NOT ONE: There is NONE that understands, there is NONE that seeks after God. They are ALL gone out of the way, they are TOGETHER become unprofitable; there is NONE that does good, no, NOT ONE" (vs. 10-12).

But those who are "poor *in spirit*" will inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3). They do not look in the proverbial mirror and give themselves a passing grade—they allow God to help them see themselves as HE sees them: *as they truly are*! Those who are poor—that is, "poor in spirit," not *always* necessarily monetarily poor—see that no matter their collection of material possessions, social prominence and influence, they are in real need.

Instead of living the attitude of "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," they need to know why they exist—whether there is something more to this temporary existence than "dying with the most toys"—if and how they fit in the overall Plan of God. They recognize things in their flesh that must be rooted out, but are powerless to do so without help from above.

They yearn to understand why so many billions have indiscriminately and often brutally suffered down through history, while others—time and again, the most callous, immoral and cruel—seemed to prosper.

Called from the "Bottom"

God uses the gospel—the GOOD NEWS of the kingdom of God—to call what would also be the "poor in spirit" to come out of this world and its ways (Rev. 18:4), and onto the path toward inheriting eternal life in His kingdom.

Those who respond eventually come to recognize that "God has chosen the *foolish things* of the world to confound the wise…the *weak things* of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and *base things* of the world, and things which are despised…*things which are not*, to bring to nothing things that are" (I Cor. 1:26-28).

Verse 29 tells why: "That no flesh should glory in His presence." No one is called because of their "greatness" or "righteousness." Christ preached the gospel to the poor to give them hope for a better world, a better future—to call those whom God can train to become

kings, judges and priests in His kingdom. The "poor in spirit" are ever aware that they need God, His laws and His kingdom—not vice-versa.

Why Parables?

Of the masses who heard Jesus preaching the gospel, God the Father was only calling a handful. Almost all churches today campaign to "save souls" or to "turn hearts to Jesus," believing Jesus spoke in parables in order for the majority of people to better understand what He was saying.

But Jesus' own words refute this claim: "And when He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable" (Mark 4:10). Christ was talking to His disciples and a few others around Him. The multitudes mentioned in verse 1 were already away from Jesus.

Then He said, "Unto *you* [His disciples] it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without [those unconverted, those He was not calling to understand], all these things are done in parables" (vs. 11).

Understand. Jesus used parables to *conceal*—to hide—the true meaning of His teaching so those God was *not* calling would *not* understand. Continue in verse 12: "That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."

Christ taught through parables to make it more difficult to understand—not easier, as most assume!

Christ preached the gospel to the masses as a witness (Matt. 24:14), not to convert them. It is this same commission that His Church has today: "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy [Spirit]: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (28:19-20).

Knowing the vast majority were not yet ready to accept God's treasure-trove of truth, explaining these in great detail would have been a waste of time, giving "that which is holy unto the dogs" and casting "pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6)—that is, giving priceless spiritual understanding to those who would trample rather than appreciate it.

Even worse, they then would have been accountable for not acting on that precious knowledge. James 4:17 states, "Therefore to

him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin"; and we saw "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

To those whom God was calling, Christ always explained such parables to His disciples privately. But there were times when Jesus used parables directly aimed at the scribes and Pharisees, who did know the spiritual intent of the messages.

During His early ministry, Jesus told the people of the region what might be called the "Galilean Parables": the *Parable of the Sower and Soil*; the *Wheat and Tares*; the *Lamp Under the Bushel*; the *Grain of Mustard Seed*; the *Kingdom Like Leaven*; the *Seed Cast into the Ground*.

But most of the parables He presented were not for the people at large, but to His disciples: the *Hidden Treasure*; the *Merchant Seeking Pearls*; the *Net Cast into the Sea*; the *Householder and His Treasure*.

Whether meant to the world or to His followers, the parable messages Jesus Christ related carried one common theme: THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Does God Show Favoritism?

When a Gentile woman pleaded with Christ to heal her demon-possessed daughter (Matt. 15:22), He was presented with a perfect opportunity to preach the gospel to her.

Instead, Jesus "answered her not a word" (vs. 23).

But the woman was persistent. As she continued to cry after Christ for help, the disciples urged Him to send her away. Finally, Jesus said to her, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (vs. 24).

Christ and the original apostles preached the good news of God's kingdom *first* to the Jews and to others who descended from Israel. It was not until sometime later when God made it clear to Peter through a vision—Acts 10—that the gospel was also to be taken to the Gentiles.

Does God show favoritism?

No. Peter, in verse 34, declared, "Of a truth I perceive that *God is no respecter of persons*."

Then why did the Jews receive the gospel—and an opportunity to be called unto salvation—first, then the Gentiles?

Recall that the Jews in Jesus' time constituted the house of Judah, which was largely comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with Levi and remnants of Simeon. After the death of

King Solomon, ancient Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel and Judah. The house of Israel rebelled against God from the very start, exchanging God's laws and statutes for pagan customs and traditions. We saw that the house of Judah, on the other hand, had an "on again, off again" relationship with God: righteous kings stirred Judah into faithful obedience, and wicked kings led God's people astray. Judah fell into a repeating cycle of worshipping the true God, falling into idolatry and rebellion, receiving punishment from God, crying out for mercy and relief, receiving deliverance, then back to worshipping the true God, etc.

Special Covenant

God sent Israel into captivity, during which they largely lost their ancient identity. This was the result of Israel refusing to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," the Fourth Commandment.

During the years of wandering through the wilderness, the Israelites entered into a special covenant with God: "Verily My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a SIGN *between Me and you throughout your generations*; that you may KNOW that I am the LORD that does SANCTIFY [set apart] you…Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a PERPETUAL COVENANT. It is a SIGN *between Me and the children of Israel forever*" (Ex. 31:13, 16-17).

The seventh-day Sabbath is a special sign that identifies the true God and His people. By not observing the day God set apart for holy observance, the Israelites (and their countless descendants over the course of history) no longer remembered who they were. Today, approximately 600 million Israelites believe they are Gentiles, and have no idea that they have been recipients of the material national blessings God promised to Abraham's descendants.

The Jews were sent into Babylonian captivity, but returned to their former homeland 70 years later. But since they kept the Sabbath (though far from faithfully), the Jews have retained their ancient identity.

But did God pick Israel to be His chosen people, "holy" and "special…above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6), because they were inherently more powerful or superior to everyone else?

Notice: "The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you,

and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, has the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (vs. 7-8).

Just as He calls the "foolish," "base," "weak" and "the things which are despised" into His Way of Life, to confound "the wise, mighty and noble" of this world, God called Israel—a slave nation within Egypt—to achieve greatness by His power. From one man, Abraham, roughly 600 million Israelites now exist, consisting of the majority of the world's richest nations.

During Christ's earthly ministry, the gospel of the kingdom of God was preached to Galilee and Judea. Today, that good news is being proclaimed to every nation and territory on Earth. And from a tiny flock that He is calling out from the world, God will use trained, tried and proven teachers, judges and rulers in the world tomorrow to lead, guide and direct untold billions onto the path that leads to eternal life.

Matthew 19:30 states, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." You may also read Matthew 20:16, Mark 10:31 and Luke 13:30. All three verses contain a statement similar to "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." These verses have dual meanings.

One meaning is that people who are first—"important"—in this life, will not necessarily have such status in the kingdom of God. Those who are of lesser standing—"the weak of the world"—are normally those God calls (I Cor. 1:27). It is, then, these individuals who will have top—FIRST—positions in God's kingdom.

God does not show favoritism. All people will be called to salvation: a handful during mankind's 6,000 years of self-rule; later, the rest of humanity. Likewise, God will build the future physical Israelite tribes—with the assistance of spiritual Israelites, those called into the Church and born into God's kingdom at Christ's Return—into a model nation that will lead all other nations in attaining universal success, prosperity, peace and joy!

But this time of worldwide happiness and prosperity is also available now.

The Abundant Life!

No chapter on the teachings of Jesus could be considered complete without the inclusion of one of His truly greatest teachings, one also largely unknown to those who profess to follow Him.

Many think the correct Christian view of this life is that it is burdensome, sort of going without and enduring a life of hardship in anticipation that "God makes up for this when we go to heaven." Millions view Christianity as little more than a series of "Thou shalt *nots*," rather than as THE PATH to enjoying a wonderful, abundant life. These same millions often think of sin as the fun that will end if they obey God. They think that "accepting Jesus" also means accepting a life of almost morbid gloom and doom.

This view could not be more wrong.

Jesus declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more *abundantly*" (John 10:10). Have *you* ever seen—or even *heard* of—this verse before? Probably not. Christ came bringing the *abundant* life—and He said so plainly!

Why then do so many believe that Christianity is supposed to be *endured* instead of *enjoyed*. Why do they not understand that the radiant, abundant life can be theirs—*if* they will follow *God's* formula to achieve it?

God never instructs or commands His people to avoid anything unless it is for *their own good*. Many things *seem* like fun, but carry a delayed penalty, and terrible price, for having done them. God instructs us on what to avoid so that we will not get hit later by an unexpected "boomerang"!

Knowledge of the abundant life is available to those who know the true Jesus Christ.

By Whose Authority?

The New Testament records numerous accounts of Jesus Christ visiting Jerusalem's Temple. It was there where Joseph and Mary, observing Old Covenant statutes, presented the Christ Child after He had been circumcised, and offered a sacrifice (Luke 2:21-24). At age 12, Jesus was in the Temple asking religious scholars probing questions. These "authorities" were taken aback by the young Boy's inquisitive nature and wisdom (vs. 46-47). Jesus also visited the Temple several times during His earthly ministry, amazing onlookers by His words and actions. Some concluded He was, indeed, the Messiah. Many others, on the other hand, disbelieved and conspired to take His life.

In the first year of His ministry, when Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem to observe the Passover season, they "found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting" (John 2:13-14).

Christ was *livid* at what He witnessed. The Temple was built as a religious center to worship the God of the universe—not for exchanging currency for personal profit!

So what did Jesus do? "And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He *drove them all out* of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and *poured out* the changers' money, and *overthrew* the tables" (vs. 15).

Why? "And said [He] unto them that sold doves, *Take these things hence; make not My Father's house an house of merchandise*. And His disciples remembered that it was written, *The zeal of Your house has*

eaten Me up" (vs. 16-17). They remembered Psalm 69:9, a prophecy describing the zealous nature of a righteous Servant foretold to be consumed with doing the will of God.

This was just one of numerous Old Testament prophecies that the Christ was to fulfill, during both His earthly ministry and later at His triumphant Return to rule God's government across the Earth.

Recall for an additional point of understanding how Jesus Christ healed people. He made the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute speak and the lame walk. He fed untold thousands from only a handful of fish and bread. He walked on water, turned water into wine, released people from the bonds of demon possession and performed countless other miracles. Jesus Christ boldly preached the gospel, delivered prophetic warnings and taught tens of thousands about God's Law, spiritually magnifying its intent.

Everything Christ said and did was with strength—boldness—power—and authority!

The apostle John wrote, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25).

Some believed Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Some were undecided. Others—the religious powers of the day—felt threatened. They had no doubt that Jesus was a "teacher come from God" (John 3:2). They witnessed the mighty miracles He performed and were amazed by their effects. They admitted among themselves, "No man can do these…except God be with him" (same verse).

But the scribes and Pharisees refused to believe Jesus was the Christ—that He had divine authority. They were righteous in their own eyes, measuring their righteousness by how well they observed minute, manmade laws and traditions, which we saw unnecessarily made the Way of God burdensome. Since Jesus did not "measure up" to *their* idea of obedience, they concluded He could not have been Christ—and they were more than willing to lie about, slander, and falsely accuse Him, and even plot His murder!

Why? "For [Jesus] taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29).

By Old Testament Prophecies

Psalm 2:7 states, "I will declare the decree: the LORD has said unto Me, You are My Son; this day have I begotten You." Jesus was the Son of God. Of all people ever born, only He was conceived by the

power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20). The Father, using an angelic being to represent His voice, publicly confirmed that Jesus was His Son: "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:16-17).

As we saw in Chapter One, Jesus' birth was foretold throughout the Old Testament. He was born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:22-23; Luke 2:7), in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:4-6), later called out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15) and reared in Galilee.

He was born to become King over the government of God (Isa. 9:6-7)—a position for which He qualified to replace Satan as this world's ruler (Matt. 4:1-11). When Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king, Christ replied, "You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37).

He also said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from here" (vs. 36). During His First Coming, Christ was also an ambassador, or representative, for God's kingdom. He was a divine Messenger bringing a message from heaven—GOOD NEWS!—about the government He represented. At Christ's Return He will replace the governments of men with the government of God (Dan. 2:34-36, 44-45).

Yet billions of professing Christians today mistakenly believe Jesus' message was about the Messenger! (This will be thoroughly covered in Chapter Sixteen.)

As the Son of God, Jesus was foretold to be born from the seed of Abraham and through the line of King David (Psa. 132:11). His genealogy was confirmed physically from the line of Mary, and legally through that of Joseph.

Jesus Christ was a High Priest, not of Aaron, but of a priesthood that had no beginning or end, "after the order of Melchizedek" (Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:5-6; 6:20; see inset in Chapter Seven.)

And, of course, He was, and is, mankind's Savior. Prophecy explained Jesus would be hated and rejected, a stone of stumbling (Psa. 69:4; 118:22; Isa. 8:14)—betrayed by a friend (Psa. 41:9; 55:12-14) and sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12-13)—forsaken by His disciples (Zech. 13:7)—even forsaken by God (Psa. 22:1), as Jesus took on the penalty of death upon His sacrifice, becoming sin. God cannot dwell with sin (Isa. 59:2).

The inset about prophecies Christ fulfilled expands this list.

By the Sign of Jonah

The people witnessed Jesus' miracles. They heard His unique understanding and wisdom, and saw that He spoke with great power and authority. And they watched as His followers changed their lives for the better.

Yet most, especially the religious leaders, were unconvinced. Their hearts were too hardened to believe Jesus was the Christ. Unbelievers pressed Him with questions, attempting to trip Him up, to somehow stump Him.

But Christ knew that miracles, the fruit of His ministry and the plain truth of His teachings did not matter to hardened hearts. So when the scribes and Pharisees demanded that Jesus produce a sign proving His authority, that He was the Messiah, He answered, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40).

Being dead, in the grave, for three days and nights—not a minute more or less—and then being resurrected by God was the only sign Jesus Christ gave!

Amazingly, the "Christian" churches, denominations and organizations of today believe that Jesus was in the grave from Friday to Sunday morning—but this is NOT "three days and three nights." To cover their error, religionists of this world's traditional Christianity teach that Jesus meant He would be in the grave for *three parts* of day and night.

But Christ said His length of time in the grave would be "AS Jonah was three days and three nights." The word "as" means this is a comparison. Check the book of Jonah. Verse 17 of the first chapter states, "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights…" The original Hebrew says exactly what it means: three individual days and three individual nights—not "a combination of three parts." (This subject is addressed in more detail in Chapter Twelve.)

By His Fruit

John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's arrival (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Luke 3:3-6), but John's short ministry ended upon His imprisonment. He knew his cousin Jesus was the promised Messiah, yet his

Old Testament Prophecies Point to Jesus of Nazareth

Throughout the past 2,000 years, there have been about 40 cases of individuals claiming to be the Messiah, but only one is backed 100% by Scripture: Jesus of Nazareth. And only He has used those Scriptures to prove His claims and has fulfilled every prophecy in thorough detail.

Recorded hundreds of years before Jesus' arrival, as many as 60 major prophecies concerning the Christ can be found in the Old Testament. Twenty-nine of these were fulfilled within the final 24 hours before Jesus' crucifixion.

Here is a sampling:

Jesus would be betrayed by a trusted friend. Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus was prophesied in Psalm 41:9: "Yes, My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread, has lifted up His heel against Me."

In John 13:18 and 26, Jesus explains this prophecy would be fulfilled by Judas Iscariot. He said that the disciple to whom He would give a piece of bread would be His betrayer: "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me. He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon."

Jesus explained why He informed the disciples of this prophecy: "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, you may believe that I am He [the Christ]" (13:19). Jesus knew He was the long-awaited Christ, but wanted to ensure that His disciples, both then and throughout the centuries, would believe Him.

The price of the betrayal would be 30 pieces of silver. The silver paid to Judas for the betrayal of Jesus was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12: "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."

The fulfillment is found in Matthew 26: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto

you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver" (vs. 14-15).

Jesus' disciples would forsake Him. "Smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zech. 13:7). Upon being arrested, the disciples (sheep) of Jesus (Shepherd) "all forsook Him, and fled" (Mark 14:50).

Jesus would not retaliate when being accused. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

Matthew 27:12 indicates that "when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing." Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, also tried to get Jesus to answer His accusers: "Then said Pilate unto Him, Hear You not how many things they witness against You? And He answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly" (vs. 13-14).

Jesus would be executed with criminals. "And He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). In Matthew 27:38 we find there "were…two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left."

Jesus' body would be pierced. The books of Psalms and Zechariah reveal that the Christ would be pierced. "They pierced My hands and My feet" (Psa. 22:16). "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). These were fulfilled when Jesus was crucified, His hands and feet nailed to a stake, and when a soldier pierced Jesus' side. The apostle John explains part of the fulfillment:

"One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34). John was an eyewitness to this event, as indicated in verse 35, and verifies this was fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah: "And again another scripture says, They shall look on Him whom they pierced" (John 19:37).

None of Jesus' bones would be broken. "He keeps all His bones: not one of them is broken" (Psa. 34:20). The fulfillment is indicated in John 19: "Then came the soldiers, and broke the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with Him.

But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they broke not His legs" (vs. 32-33).

Once again, John verifies that this prophecy was fulfilled: "For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken" (vs. 36).

Those witnessing Jesus' crucifixion would cast lots for His clothing. "They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture" (Psa. 22:18). John testifies, in John 19, that this was fulfilled by Roman soldiers: "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also His coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which says, They parted My raiment among them, and for My vesture they did cast lots" (vs. 23-24).

Jesus would be offered vinegar and gall. Matthew 27:34 indicates that Jesus was offered vinegar before dying on a stake. This was prophesied in Psalm 69:21, centuries beforehand: "They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink."

Various studies have been performed calculating the odds of these prophecies being randomly fulfilled by one individual. The odds of just eight being fulfilled in any one person are one chance in 10^{17}, which equates to the number 1 with 17 zeros behind it!

To comprehend the enormity of this number, we can compare it to the probability of a blind man locating a marked silver dollar in a sea of silver dollars scattered across Texas two feet deep, each one stacked on top of the other!

What about the probability of 48 of the 60 major prophecies on the Christ being fulfilled by one individual? 1 in 10^{157}, or the number 1 with 157 zeros behind it! This is greater than the number of atoms in the entire known universe!

As you can see, though many still raise numerous objections and reject Him, many prophecies exist that point to one individual as having fulfilled the role of the Christ—the Jesus found in the New Testament.

faith temporarily wavered; he needed it to be strengthened. John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You He that should come? Or look we for another?" (Luke 7:18-19).

Jesus' answer? "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (vs. 22). In other words, His FRUITS stood as evidence of His prophesied ministry (Matt. 7:18-20).

Again, even the scribes and Pharisees privately admitted among themselves that the awesome miracles Jesus performed could only have been done through the power of God (John 3:1-2)—yet publicly they accused Him of doing these through Satan's power (Luke 11:15)!

The Messiah was foretold to work miracles (Isa. 35:5-6; Matt. 11:4-6; John 11:47)—to preach through parables (Psa. 78:2; Matt. 13:34-35)—to be filled with zeal for His "Father's business" (Luke 2:49; Psa. 69:9; John 2:17). The ministry of Jesus Christ, the Chief Apostle, bore fruit in the form of 12 original apostles, later joined by Paul and others. The first-century Church dramatically multiplied in membership because the brethren "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching] and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). The apostles faithfully taught what the Chief Apostle had taught. They did not deviate from their Master's teachings. They instructed everyone, from lay member to minister, to "continue you in the things which you have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you have learned them" (II Tim. 3:14).

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd—the voice of truth (John 10:7-11, 14). His faithful and obedient shepherds—true ministers of God—speak with the same voice.

Discerning True Ministers from False Ones

Jesus Christ spoke and taught with the authority of God. The fruit of His ministry, all the prophecies He fulfilled that applied to His First Coming, and the fact that He obeyed and pleased God, and did God's will, not His own, are evidence—PROOF—of Christ's authority and power.

And, just as Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, He authorized His faithful ministers to do the same (Matt. 28:19-20). They are to be found doing so right up to the final days just prior to His Return.

Yet who *are* Christ's ministers?

Jesus warned, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:4-5)—many through the 2,000 years leading to His Return would claim to represent Christ's message, saying, "Jesus was the Messiah," yet preaching "*another* gospel," because they actually serve "*another* Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4).

But of those who preach "any other gospel"—a message other than the one Christ preached—Scripture pronounces a double curse! (Read Galatians 1:6-9.)

Jesus did not take authority to Himself—He received it from God, confirmed by fruit, miracles, the fulfillment of prophecies, His perfect obedience, and the truth He taught and lived by, all reflecting His Father's will.

Likewise, true ministers of Jesus Christ are faithful servants of God. They OBEY Him, teaching others to do the same. They preach the same gospel Christ preached, the very same message Jesus delivered and taught His disciples to "teach all nations…to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

A glowing personality or awe-inspiring speaking and writing skills are not, by themselves, the only proof that Christ is working through a man. A true minister of Christ also teaches and conducts His personal life with the same voice of truth with which Jesus spoke.

It is up to the Bible student to follow the examples of the Bereans, who "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Jesus Christ was the Word; He always spoke and expressed the truth and will of God. The Bible—God's Word in written form—is truth (John 17:17). So is God's Law (Psa. 119:142). Any minister who preaches that the Law of God is "done away" or "done for you, so there's no need to keep it," or who preaches a gospel other than the kingdom of God, DOES NOT speak with the voice of truth!

They speak with authority from "another Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4), who influences and uses "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" (vs. 13). God neither sent nor authorized them to speak in His name. They authorized themselves!

God calls such false leaders "prophets" who "prophesy lies in My name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nothing, and the deceit of their heart" (Jer.

14:14); and "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jer. 23:21).

Incredibly, BILLIONS happily follow religious leaders on the basis of personality, appearance and speaking ability. They allow themselves to fall under the spell of theological rhetoric masquerading as "truth." Of such leaders, the Bible plainly states, "Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers"—speaking of Satan—"also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (II Cor. 11:15).

However, Jesus' sheep "follow Him: for they know His voice" (John 10:4). Christ's shepherds—*His* ministers—speak with *His* "voice." Only these hold authority to preach in Christ's name!

"I and My Father Are One"

Lazarus was dead, victim of a fatal illness. His sisters Mary and Martha grieved with his friends over his sudden death. Jesus Christ also wept—though not for the same reason.

When the people saw Christ approach Lazarus' tomb, "groaning in Himself" (John 11:38), some in the crowd said, "Behold how He loved him!" Others criticized Him: "Could not this Man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" (vs. 36-37).

It did not dawn on His audience that Jesus "groaned in the Spirit, and was troubled" (vs. 33) because of their stunning lack of faith and understanding.

As He approached the tomb, Martha said to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother [would] not have died" (vs. 21).

When Jesus told her that Lazarus "shall rise again," she simply replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (vs. 23-24).

Martha and the others "didn't get it." Despite the amazing miracles they had witnessed Christ perform, they never considered that He had the authority—right then and there—to resurrect the dead. "I AM the resurrection, and the life," He assured Martha. "He that believes in Me, though He were dead, yet shall he live" (vs. 25).

After the people reluctantly obeyed His order to remove the stone from Lazarus' grave, Jesus looked up into the sky and boldly prayed aloud before the onlookers. "Father, I thank You that You have heard

Me," He said. "*And I knew that You hear Me always*: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that You have sent Me" (vs. 41-42).

Then Jesus commanded, "Lazarus, come forth!"—and Lazarus instantly came back to life.

The four Gospel books are filled with accounts of Jesus boldly walking in faith to perform astounding miracles. Jesus made it clear that He, of His own physical self, did not perform miracles—His Father performed them through Him: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwells in Me, *He does the works*" (John 14:10).

Their relationship was so close, so unique, that they were always of the same mind, will and purpose. Christ confidently knew His Father would back Him up in doing the humanly impossible. Many times Jesus spoke about their special bond:

"As the Father knows Me, even so know I the Father" (John 10:15).

"I and My Father are one" (vs. 30).

"The Father is in Me, and I in Him" (vs. 38).

"Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me" (14:11).

"You, Father, are in Me, and I in You…We are one" (17:21-22).

The bond between the Father and Jesus Christ, which has existed from eternity, serves as a model for the relationship God ultimately desires to share with humanity.

Throughout Eternity

Before the Earth existed—before there were moons, planets, stars, constellations, galaxies and everything found in the ever-expanding universe—there was God.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. The same was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2).

"There is *one* God," the apostle James wrote (Jms. 2:19). "God" in Old Testament Hebrew is *Elohim*, a collective noun that can be used in both singular and plural forms, such as with "sheep, deer, cattle, offspring, series, species, equipment, aircraft" and other terms. It was *Elohim* who said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). One God—one divine family, or kingdom—comprised of two individual Members.

God and the Word (who was also God) never argued, never debated, never worked against each other, but instead lived and

worked together in perfect unison, harmony and peace throughout eternity.

In the book of Amos, God asks a rhetorical question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (3:3).

The answer is an obvious "no." God and the Word were able to "walk together" without contention because they always agreed with each other.

But how?

One had to take the lead and make the final decisions. Think of the sign on U.S. President Harry S. Truman's desk: "The buck stops here." The Other—the Word (*logos* in Greek)—represented God, serving as divine "Spokesman" for God's kingdom, following, supporting and carrying out God's commands. One led; the other followed His lead. Yet they were both equally God, in character and power. Their relationship reflected government in action.

For example, the two Beings in the Godhead had a "profession": creating, planning, designing, building and sustaining. In this regard, each Member of the God Family had a role to play. The One whom we know today as the Father was the executive decision-maker. The Word served as Counselor and implementer—the One who made the decisions happen, via the power of the Holy Spirit.

Both Beings worked together in one mindset. There was no room for envy, pride or selfish ambition, for God is love (I John 4:16)—and love "is kind; [it] envies not…vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth…[Love] never fails" (I Cor. 13:4-6, 8).

The government-based relationship between God and the Word functioned through love and truth. Love is outgoing concern for others, lowering the self to serve others' needs, concerns and interests. Truth—God's Word and His Law (Psa. 119:142; John 17:17)—tells one *how* to express love: "Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

Theirs was not a lopsided totalitarian relationship in which one "lorded over" the other. They were a team—they worked together to achieve the same goals. God was the Supreme Leader, and the Word, or "Spokesman," represented His will and made it come to pass.

As we have seen, God created angels and extended His government through them under the archangels (Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer). Then God created the universe, including the Earth. Everything was perfect; all went according to plan…until Lucifer

Who Was Melchizedek?

In the book of Genesis, there is a reference to Melchizedek (14:18-20). Many have wondered about the identity of this individual.

The book of Hebrews sheds light on who fulfilled this role: "For this Melchizedek, King of Salem, Priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him" (7:1). It is important to note that Melchizedek had *two* other titles—King of Salem and Priest of the Most High God.

The apostle Paul went into greater detail in verses 2 and 3: "To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation *King of righteousness*, and after that also King of Salem, which is, *King of peace*; without father, without mother, without descent, having *neither beginning of days, nor end of life*; but made like unto the *Son of God*; abides a priest *continually*."

Here, Paul is describing one who has existed for eternity, as indicated by the phrase "having neither be-

and the angels under him rebelled against their Creator. In the wake of their rebellion, the physical universe was left in decay (Rom. 8:20-21). Many years later, perhaps multiple millions, God recreated the Earth (Gen. 1) to provide a suitable environment for His next creation: man.

Through humanity, God planned to expand His Family. Man was created temporary, fragile, physically limited to his environment. God endowed him with mind power (in contrast to animals, which function on instinct), imparting man with creative intelligence and ingenuity. Yet man was created spiritually incomplete; he needed an *additional* Spirit at work in his mind so that he could successfully solve spiritual problems and have a personal relationship with his

ginning of days, nor end of life." This alone proves that Melchizedek could not have been a human king, as is the common assertion. Further, because the passage describes Him as not having "beginning of days," this personage also could not have been an angel, since angels are created beings—they had a definite beginning. Only *God* has existed for eternity. This leaves only two Beings able to fulfill the role of Melchizedek: the Father or Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 5 removes all doubt of Melchizedek's identity: "So also Christ glorified not Himself to be *made an High Priest*; but He that said unto Him, You are My Son, today have I begotten You. As He says also in another place, You are a *priest forever after the order of Melchisedec*" (vs. 5-6). The Moffatt translation best renders "after the order of Melchizedec" as "with the rank of Melchizedec." Christ held the *rank* of Melchizedek during the time of Abraham—and, as the God of the Old Testament, is the Being who is referred to as Melchizedek in Genesis.

In just a few verses, we have seen that Jesus Christ was the One called Melchizedek.

Maker. With God's Spirit building holy, righteous character in him, man would have the potential to be born into the God Family.

However, man sinned, choosing to eat of the wrong tree—that of *self*-knowledge, judging *for oneself* right from wrong. In effect, he cut himself off from God, to live a lifetime of decisions that, at best, would be a poisonous mixture of good and evil.

With the ultimate goal of bringing mankind into salvation, a Savior was needed, One for whom sin was *possible*, yet sin-free so He would be a perfect sacrifice, taking onto Himself the penalty of sin—death (Rom. 6:23)—in mankind's stead.

And so the Word, through the power of God's Spirit, allowed Himself to be born flesh (John 1:14).

Father and Son Relationship

The close bond between God and the Word continued in Jesus Christ's earthly ministry.

The Rock of the Old Testament lowered Himself to be born of a woman. Notice: "Who [Christ], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

Jesus was God in the flesh, a member and representative of the kingdom of God, yet He was physical.

Christ, the living Word personified, authored the written Word, the Bible. During His time in the flesh, Jesus used the "Bible" in His mind—the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17)—to make right decisions. He knew well the verses describing the true nature of man (Jer. 17:9; Prov. 14:12; 16:2, 25; 21:2), which is why Jesus said, "Why call you Me good? None is good, save one, that is, God" (Luke 18:19).

He later inspired the apostle Paul to write, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) *dwells no good thing*: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

Therefore, Christ daily practiced suppressing His own will—the natural human reasoning that dwells in man's nature—to serve His Father's will. Jesus knew Him. He trusted Him. He placed His life and safety in God's hands.

Again, Christ, of His own physical self, did not perform miracles—His Father did them through Him (John 14:10). Jesus exercised perfect faith, *knowing* His prayers would be answered because He always sought and prayed according to God's will.

Later, during His earthly ministry, Jesus performing awesome miracles was the result of Him seeking power from the ultimate authority in the universe—God Supreme—and then exercising that authority while seeking His Father's will.

It was this relationship of faith, power, authority, government, truth and love that enabled Christ, when He was about to be arrested, tried, tortured and crucified, to pray, "Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless *not My will*, *but Yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42).

"One God…One Mediator"

Jesus knows what it is like to be human, to feel the temptations and pressures that come from the self, society and Satan. He knows what it is like to wage spiritual warfare day after day after day. He knows that the flesh is weak, that it becomes weary. Christ knows what it means to be tempted.

Yet He never gave in. He never gave up (Heb. 4:15).

And today Jesus Christ is in heaven with the Father, serving as our "Mediator between God and men" (I Tim. 2:5). He is able to relate to God what we as fallible human beings experience in striving to overcome sin.

Jesus takes the prayers of His people before God's throne, into the "Holy of Holies," and gives them the authority to pray to God directly. This is why we are to close our prayers with, "In Jesus' name" or "In the name of Jesus Christ," or something similar.

True Christians are spiritually begotten sons of God. They have God's Spirit dwelling in them: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His…For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:9, 14). This potent verse is rarely considered. Why are so few concerned with a passage so definitive in regard to who is and is not a Christian?

Today, Christ is working through Christians to conquer sin just as He did—by giving them the power to fully submit to the Father's will. He enables them to use the Holy Spirit so that it "helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (vs. 26).

As a Christian's Elder Brother—"the firstborn among many brethren" (vs. 29), fellow "firstfruit" (Jms. 1:18)—Jesus assists His people in fulfilling their incredible human potential, to ultimately be born into the God Family. He works to help Christians grow in the father-son relationship He shares with God.

In effect, our Mediator is working to bring us to the point where we can say, "I and My Father are one."

Jesus' Final Passover

Jesus Christ silently scanned the room and gazed upon His 12 apostles-in-training. During the past 3½ years, the men had been through much together. They had seen vast throngs pursue Jesus to heal the sick and infirmed and they had seen the same swelling crowds diminish after Christ made plain that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto [eternal] life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14).

The 12 disciples had witnessed their Teacher free people from demon possession—yet His enemies accused Him of being possessed by demons. Peter, James, John and the others had seen Jesus enjoy some of the physical benefits of life, such as food and drink, always in balance—yet His detractors accused Him of being gluttonous and a winebibber (Luke 7:34). The disciples were there, time after time, when Jesus sought privacy, a few fleeting moments to pray to His Father and recharge Himself spiritually—yet when people came to Him for help, Christ put the needs of others first.

And now Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem for the Passover, sharing a private meal in the upper room of a house. It would be their final evening together.

Peter and the others took note of Jesus' expression: a mixture of care and concern with a serious tone. It was evident that something weighed heavily upon His mind. Since Jesus had long been open-hearted with them, they did not ask Him about it. They knew He would eventually tell them.

The Footwashing Service

A dispute arose among the twelve men: *Which one of us would be the greatest in the kingdom of God?* (Luke 22:24).

As He had done before, Jesus had to set their thinking straight. He instructed, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors." History is replete with kings, dictators, presidents and other leaders who sought to benefit themselves at the expense of their miserable subjects.

"But this shall not be so among you. He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he who is chief, as he that does serve. For which is greater: he who sits at the dinner table, or he who serves? Is not he who sits at dinner? But I am among you as He who serves."

A true follower of Jesus Christ does not serve by seeking power and authority. Rather, he serves with humility and selflessness—and *then* God will reward him with power and authority. Serving the needs of others means sacrificing one's time and energy, as Jesus did in healing the sick, freeing people from demon possession, and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, day after day, city after city. And sometimes serving the needs of others means laying down one's life (John 15:13-14), as Jesus would do for humanity—past, present and future—on the stake.

This lesson in service and humility perfectly introduced what Christ was about to do next: institute what would become the annual footwashing service.

Jesus rose from the dinner table and put aside His outer garments. Then, as His disciples looked on, He took a towel and tied it around Himself, assuming the dress of a servant. Next, He poured water into a basin, stooped down to His knees and began to wash the disciples' feet, afterward wiping them dry with the towel He had around His waist.

In Jesus' time, people wore open sandals, which collected dirt and dust throughout the day. It was the custom for hosts to have a servant wash the feet of houseguests. This lowly service, which fulfilled a genuine need, was far from being glamorous or high-profile. It required physically lowering oneself to his knees to serve the lowest part of the body. As one washes the feet of another person, thoughts of vanity and self-promotion are deflated; he spiritually takes on the humble attitude of a servant, focusing on others, not the

self, "esteem[ing] other[s] better than themselves" and "look[ing] not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

Peter was stunned! Here was the Messiah—the Christ—the Son of God—the Rock of the Old Testament (I Cor. 10:1-4)—the One who spoke to Abraham, Moses and other great servants of the past—performing the task of a lowly servant. *And now He's about to wash my feet!* Peter thought.

When Jesus came to him, Peter said, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" (John 13:6).

Christ knew Peter well, that he was bold, impetuous and tended to rush to conclusions. Yet Jesus also knew that once Peter would receive the Holy Spirit, it would help him to develop holy, righteous, godly character, directing Peter's natural boldness and confidence to do God's will. The power of God's Spirit would activate within Peter the unique and intense training he had personally received from Christ, which would transform him into a dynamic leader in preaching the true gospel and feeding the flock of God.

"What I am doing you do not understand at this time," Jesus patiently explained to him. "But you shall know hereafter" (vs. 7).

Still, it was difficult for Peter to accept his feet being washed by his Master and Teacher. *This is the lowliest of jobs*, he thought, *worthy only of the lowliest of servants!* "You shall never wash my feet" (vs. 8), Peter said.

Jesus answered, "If I wash you not, you have no part with Me."

Rushing to the other extreme, Peter replied, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (vs. 9).

Ever patient, Jesus said, "He that is washed need not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and you are clean" (vs. 10). Christians are made spiritually clean through faith in and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice (I John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; 7:14). The waters of baptism symbolically wash away all sins (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5). With Christ as High Priest in heaven, mediating to the Father on our behalf, Christians can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

But then Christ said to His disciples, "But not all are clean" (John 13:10). He was speaking of Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew all along that Judas was driven by greed, which had seduced him to betray the responsibility Christ gave him—managing the treasury, from which Judas had stolen. Instead of repenting from his sins, Judas justified his actions, leading to even more sins. This eventually led to the unthink-

able: he secretly struck a deal to betray Jesus and deliver Him into the hands of His murderous enemies.

Jesus was well aware of this betrayal, because it was foretold hundreds of years earlier. Despite this, Jesus washed Judas' feet, a man whom He had called friend. By humbly serving the man who was about to betray Him, Christ personally set the example of humbly serving one's enemies and overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:19-21).

After the footwashing service, Jesus said to His disciples, "Know you not what I have done? You call me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you…The servant is not greater than his lord; neither He [Jesus] that is sent greater than He [God the Father] that sent Him. If you know these things, *happy* are you if you DO them" (John 13:12-17).

In serving the needs of others—without exalting the self or seeking to fulfill selfish ambition—Jesus Christ set the high standard all Christians are to follow.

Annual Memorial

Redirecting their minds to thoughts of serving others, Jesus, after Judas Iscariot had departed to betray Him (John 13:18-32), was now ready to institute new Passover symbols for the New Testament Church. He took unleavened bread, prayed over it, and then broke it into several bite-sized pieces, which He distributed among the eleven remaining disciples. Christ said to them, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you: This do in remembrance of Me" (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).

Jesus then took a cup of wine, said a blessing over it, and gave it to His disciples. "All of you drink of it," He said, "for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Luke 22:20; Matt. 26:27-28; Mark 14:23-24).

"In remembrance"—in recollection; Christ was instituting an annual reminder of the New Covenant Passover—a "memorial" service observed in memory of Jesus Christ's death. A memorial service is not observed daily, weekly, or monthly, but rather annually.

For Christians, "Christ [is their] Passover sacrificed for [them]" (I Cor. 5:7). As the true "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), Jesus was sacrificed on the same day as the physical Passover sacrificial lambs were killed: the 14th of Abib. Therefore, Christians are to observe the death

of their Passover Lamb annually on Abib 14, not "between the two evenings" at the end of the day, but at the *beginning*, on the anniversary of "the same night in which [Jesus] was betrayed" (I Cor. 11:23).

Sadly, millions of this world's "Christians" partake weekly of symbols they believe are "the Lord's Supper"—not understanding they have been deceived.

Why Bread?

No matter where you live on Earth, bread and bread products are universal, in one form or another, among all cultures, societies and traditions. The various types of breads most people eat share at least one thing in common: they contain yeast or other leavening agents. These work within the dough to expand it and make the bread elastic and much easier to chew.

In the Bible, leaven symbolizes sin. Just as "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (I Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9), sin always leads to more sins, until it permeates one's character. And, just as leaven expands, or "puffs up," bread dough much larger than its original size, sin—such as vanity and pride—"puffs up" a person's view of himself. For this reason, "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes" (Prov. 16:2). When leaven enlarges dough, it produces bread riddled with empty pockets of air. Similarly are the lives of men, all of whom have sinned (Rom. 3:23). They appear smooth, self-confident, sometimes even "larger than life," but within they are vain—empty.

Jesus Christ, as a physical human being, was different. He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

Like unleavened bread, Jesus was "flat"—humble, not puffed up with a self-image of vanity, pride and self-importance. Void of the "malice and wickedness" of this world, Christ was—and the Bible states He is—"the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Cor. 5:8).

Again, bread made with leavening is much easier to chew, just as the ways of this world are easier to "digest." Its currents are swift and lead away from God's kingdom, "for WIDE is the gate, and BROAD is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matt. 7:13). But choosing to live God's Way means to swim against the current, to deny oneself and regularly replace the leavening of Satan's society with the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

How Often Should the Lord's Supper Be Taken?

Various traditions exist concerning *when* and *how often* the Lord's Supper should be observed. Some churches take this "supper" once a month on Wednesday night, while others take it every Sunday. Still others take it 12 times a year on Sunday. Some believe it should be taken at night, while others prefer the morning.

All of this confusion is unnecessary, as the Bible clearly reveals when and how often to partake of the Passover symbols.

There was a specific *time* that Jesus first introduced the symbols of the bread and the wine and *how often* they were to be taken. In doing this, He set an important example: "And when *the hour was come* [a specific time], He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him…And He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: *this do in remembrance* [a memorial] *of Me*. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:14, 19-20).

Jesus referenced a specific "hour was come" to partake of the bread and wine. The example He set involved a definite time, or hour, for this supper. The phrase, "in remembrance of Me," connotes, in this case, a memorial of His death. Also, He commanded the disciples by saying, "*this do*." Matthew's account of this same night states that this ordinance was instituted "as they were eating" (26:26). Compare Matthew 26:17 and Luke 22:15. These verses plainly show that *what* they were eating was the *Passover Supper!*

Christ understood that the time for His sacrifice was come and that He was our Passover—who was to be sacrificed for us (I Cor. 5:7). Matthew 26:2 refers to this event as the "*feast of the passover*, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."

The disciples asked Jesus, in Matthew 26:17, "Where will You that we prepare for You to eat *the passover*?" Mark

14:15 shows that it was to be held in a "large upper room furnished and prepared." The disciples were to get ready for this important event.

The Lord's Supper was really the *Passover Supper*! To better understand what Christ was introducing, we need to briefly study the Passover of the Old Testament. This will directly *connect* the Old Testament Passover to the New Testament "Lord's Supper."

The Old Covenant Passover

Most children learn in Sunday school the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt. The famous movie *The Ten Commandments* tells the Hollywood version of Pharaoh's resistance to Moses' instruction from God and the resultant plagues that God poured out. The 12th chapter of Exodus explains the key events of this original Passover.

God told the Israelites to take a young lamb, without spot or blemish, to represent a type of Christ—the Lamb of God. This was always to be done on the tenth day of the first month of the Hebrew sacred year. Unlike all humanly devised calendars that begin the year in mid-winter, the sacred year began *in the spring*, around the equinox, with the new moon.

Four days later, on the 14th day of Abib (the first Hebrew month), the lamb was to be killed. Exodus 12:6 says that it was to be killed "in the evening," but the original Hebrew means "between the two evenings." Some Bible margins plainly state this. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* explains that this is the period commonly referred to as *twilight* or *dusk*. This period is described as the time *after* sundown but *before* full darkness has occurred. In other words, it was at the very *beginning* of the 14th that the lamb was killed—and soon thereafter, the blood of the lamb was sprinkled above the doorposts of the Israelites' houses. At midnight, the death angel struck dead all the firstborn of Egypt. But God had told the Israelites, "when I see the blood, I will *pass over* you"—hence, the well-known term *Passover*.

Israel continued to observe the Passover season for hundreds of years!

Deuteronomy 16:6 shows that the lamb was always slain as the sun was setting, yet it was always eaten *during*

the 14th day, not afterward (Lev. 23:5-6). God does things exactly on time! The time is once a year, at night, in the beginning of the 14th of Abib—after the sun has set!

Passover to Be Observed Forever

There can be no doubt that God ordained the Passover as a permanent ordinance—*forever* (Ex. 12:17, 24)! Just as Romans 2:29 explains a change in circumcision—in the New Testament it was to be of the heart and not the flesh—Jesus altered the way Passover was to be observed. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. He was slain for mankind, doing away with the need for a *literal* young lamb to be sacrificed. As Christ explained, the bread and wine, symbolizing His broken body and shed blood, was to be an annual "look back" to His death—on our behalf!

Jesus kept the Passover once a year at an *established*—a *set*—time (Luke 2:42), and true Christians follow His example (I Peter 2:21). In fact, Christ Himself was following the example of Exodus 13:10, which explained that the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread were to be kept annually. It says there, "You shall therefore keep this ordinance *in his season from year to year*." Do you see these two phrases? It does not say "week to week" or "month to month"—or "pick any season you wish." All manmade traditions of time violate this basic instruction!

For the Israelites to have kept this at any *other* time would have literally jeopardized their firstborn from protection from the death angel. There was no room for miscalculation on their part or they could not have expected to be "passed over"—protected!

How Often Did the New Testament Church Keep the Passover?

Does the New Testament provide clear instructions regarding how often the Passover ordinance should be observed?

I Corinthians 5:7-8 sets the stage for later instructions from the apostle Paul that we will review momentarily. These verses state, "*Christ our passover* is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us *keep the feast*, not with old leaven…but with the *unleavened bread* of sincerity and truth."

Here, in the *New Testament*, Paul plainly calls Christ the Passover and gives instructions to Christians to observe the Days of Unleavened Bread. In this same epistle, he gives further instructions about the Passover observance.

I Corinthians 11:23-28 is often misunderstood by people to be a license from Paul to observe the Passover *as often as one wishes to do it*. The phrase "as oft as you drink it" is said by many to mean that Christians may take the bread and the wine as often as *they choose*! The proper explanation of these verses springs from verse 24. Notice that the Passover is a *memorial*, a "remembrance." Memorials are observed on an *annual* basis. Verse 26 shows that this memorial refers to "the Lord's death," which occurred *on the Passover* (remember, Christ is our Passover [I Cor. 5:7]). In ancient Israel, the Passover was always kept *once a year*. Verse 28 shows that the Passover ceremony is preceded by *careful self-examination*—which could not logically be done every day or every week.

Verse 29 warns of Christians taking the Passover "unworthily." Self-examination was tied to this warning (vs. 28), just as was the issue of *when* it was taken (vs. 23). Christians must properly discern the symbols that represent Christ's sacrifice.

It should be clear by now that the New Testament Lord's Supper is a direct continuation of the Old Testament Passover, except that different symbols, commemorating Jesus' death, have replaced the slaying and eating of a young spring lamb. As we have seen, Christ is slain for us in place of a literal lamb. This ordinance should still be observed on the 14th of Abib. Nowhere did God change this instruction! Recall that Christ readied His disciples for the Passover—"when the hour was come." It was taken at the *right time* and on the *right day*.

Coming out of Egypt was a type of coming out of *sin.* The Passover memorialized God's deliverance of Israel from sin. Jesus' sacrifice, through the New Testament ordinance of the bread and wine, does exactly the same thing for Christians today. Christ was seized, falsely accused and imprisoned, examined, tortured, beaten and crucified—to pay for and cover our sins—*all in the following daylight portion* of the exact same day of the month Abib! Scholars do

not dispute this time sequence. Hence, this all occurred on the 14th of the month of Abib.

Christians are to copy the example of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:21)—and He set the example of keeping the Passover. Christians are commanded to keep it *forever*—as were the Israelites when God first instituted it. To observe it daily, weekly or monthly is to trivialize this deeply important and solemn annual occasion. The Passover was always intended to be a yearly memorial. Jesus, as our Passover, was crucified at the time of the Passover—which is observed once a year. Men are never permitted to arbitrarily place Christ back on the cross, even symbolically, as often as they choose! This does not "glorify Christ"—it disobeys Him and dishonors His sacrifice. (Notice Hebrews 6:6.)

The Book of Acts Sets the New Testament Pattern

The book of Acts demonstrates which days the early Church observed. Notice Acts 20:6: "And we sailed away from Philippi after the *days of unleavened bread*." Nearly 30 years after the death of Christ, Luke is referencing the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Also, Acts 12:3 states, "Then were the *days of unleavened bread*." Some choose to focus on verse 4, where a reference to *Easter* is found in the King James translation. This text bears careful examination. In verse 1, Herod had begun to persecute the Church. This ended with the brutal death by sword of the apostle James, which so pleased the Jews that Peter was also imprisoned. The plan was to later deliver him to the Jews also. The stage is now set to *properly* read verse 4. "And when he [Herod] had apprehended him [Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after *Easter* to bring him forth to the people." Is this reference *New Testament proof* for the observance of Easter?

Emphatically, no!

Although the New Testament is recorded in the Greek language, the word translated *Easter* is derived from the *Hebrew* word *pecach* (or *pesach*)! This word has only one possible meaning. It *always* means Passover and can *never* mean Easter! The Greek language does not contain an equivalent word for Passover, so the equivalent word *pascha*

was the only available word to reference the correct meaning—*passover*!

Numerous other translations correctly render this verse using the word *Passover* instead of *Easter*. Consequently, the New Testament, when correctly translated, does not mention the celebration of Easter anywhere!

Misreading the Term "Break Bread"

Now return to Acts 20. This is a remarkable account. Paul was visiting the Troas congregation immediately after the Days of Unleavened Bread. He spent an entire Sabbath preaching to the brethren and continued well into Saturday night—or the first day of the week. Leviticus 23:32 shows that God counts days from sundown to sundown, or "even[ing] unto even[ing]." The first day of the week started at sundown on Saturday evening. Some claim that Acts 20:7 refers to keeping the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning because the term "break bread" was used. This is not true. Paul's long preaching had left people hungry. It was midnight and they wanted to eat. This is why verse 11 says those present "had broken bread *and eaten*." This was an ordinary meal, not the observing of the Lord's Supper. Other passages prove this.

Acts 2:46 speaks of the disciples who, "continuing *daily*… *breaking bread* from house to house, did *eat their meat* with gladness." The account shows that the brethren were doing this daily. Obviously, human beings *do* eat daily. This is by no means a reference to first-century Christians partaking of the Passover every day.

Further, Acts 27:34-35 explains, "Wherefore…take some meat…he took bread…and when he had broken it, he began to eat." Finally, even Jesus said, in Matthew 26:29, that He would not take the "Lord's Supper" until after He had returned to earth in His kingdom. However, Luke 24:30, *at a later time*, shows Him to have sat "at meat," or eating a meal, with the disciples. He broke bread and blessed it on that occasion. If this were a reference to Jesus partaking of the Lord's Supper, His statement in Matthew 26:29 would have been false! There are cultures today, particularly some Europeans, who still use the term "break bread" to mean the actual breaking of a certain type of bread as they eat a meal. This should now be clear.

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it" (vs. 14).

Early in His ministry, Jesus said, "He that believes on Me has everlasting life. *I am that bread of life*" (John 6:47-48). The ancient Israelites—the physical "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38)—ate manna from heaven, yet "are dead" (John 6:49). Physical Israel enjoyed bountiful material, national blessings. However, they were not offered God's Spirit or the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Spiritual Israelites—those in the Body of Christ—stand to receive infinitely greater promises than material blessings. "This is the bread which comes down from heaven," Jesus said, referring to Himself, "that a man may eat thereof, and not die. *I am the living bread* which came down from heaven: if any man eat of *this* bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (vs. 50-51).

The apostle Paul states, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion [participation, distribution, fellowship] of the body of Christ? For we being many are *one bread*, and *one body*: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (I Cor. 10:16-17).

Why "Broken"?

The small, broken pieces of unleavened bread that Christians are to eat at the Passover service symbolize Jesus' "broken" body. Consider all the abuses and torment Jesus took upon His body because all human beings have broken God's physical laws.

"I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:6).

"His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (Isa. 52:14).

"I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint [but not broken]…I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me" (Psa. 22:14, 17).

"Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was *wounded for our transgressions*, He was bruised *for our iniquities*: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and *with His stripes we are healed*. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His

mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:4-7).

"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief… He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities…because He has poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:10-12).

For the past 6,000 years, men have judged for themselves right from wrong, without seeking instruction and direction from God. Consequently, mankind has reaped sicknesses, diseases, cancers, degenerative syndromes, deformities—physical penalties derived from breaking God's commandments, statutes, judgments and overarching principles of living the right way. Through Jesus' "broken" body, we can be healed: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: *by whose stripes you were healed*" (I Pet. 2:24).

Yet none of Christ's bones were broken. His body, though it severely suffered, remained as one. And so does Christ's spiritual Body, for "He is the head of the body, *the church*" (Col. 1:18).

Jesus Christ "lives in" Christians through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, making them part of the one "Body" of Christ—the undivided Church of God (Gal. 2:20).

"Ratified in Blood"

When God redeemed ancient Israel from slavery in Egypt, He entered into a covenant with them. He promised to grant national blessings in the Promised Land as long as the Israelites faithfully served Him. The covenant was then ratified in the blood of animal sacrifices (Ex. 24:7-8).

But the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Heb. 10:4). Another, infinitely greater, blood sacrifice was needed: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14).

Jesus was perfect in all His ways—"a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Pet. 1:19). It took the sacrifice of a flawless, sinless life to redeem the blemished and spotted lives of men. To fulfill this purpose, innocent blood had to be shed: "For the life of the flesh is in

the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11).

The Old Covenant served as a type for the New Covenant, which is also ratified in blood (Heb. 9:20), but it is a "*better* covenant [testament, compact, contract], which was established upon *better* promises" (Heb. 8:6; also read verses 7-13).

The "blood of the [new] covenant" delivers Christians from their ultimate enemies: sin and death. This is why Jesus said, "Whoever eats My flesh, and drinks My blood, has eternal life" (John 6:54).

Just as God delivered Israel from slavery so that they might "serve" Him (Ex. 3:12; 8:1, 20), He is delivering Christians from *spiritual* slavery to sin, so that they might "serve [God] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74-75).

Having instituted the new Passover symbols of the bread and wine, Christ was now ready to make the ultimate sacrifice…

...And Jesus Suffered

The Bible states of Jesus that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). Eleven words—one sentence of Scripture. Undoubtedly, this verse has been read countless times by millions. But how many have recognized the profound meaning of these words?

How many have stopped to meditate upon the significance of this portion of God's Word? How many have grasped what it meant for Jesus Christ to have come to His own—His own people and nation—but also His own creation—and be rejected?

Very few understand, with any level of depth or clarity, what Jesus endured during His 3½-year earthly ministry. From the very beginning of His ministry, until its end, Christ faced and persevered through opposition, accusation, interrogation, schemes, plots, threats—and, ultimately, absolute rejection and death. Few even begin to comprehend the suffering of Jesus Christ.

Opposed by Religious Leaders

As Jesus traveled throughout Judea teaching, performing miracles and healing the sick, His notoriety grew; large masses began to follow Him from place to place, assembling to hear Him speak. The excitement and "buzz" about Jesus of Nazareth was on the minds of thousands. Great numbers anticipated a chance to hear Him speak.

But not all felt this way.

Having heard of Jesus, a group of Pharisees and Sadducees sought Him one day. But they were not interested in hearing His teaching.

"Show us a sign," one of them demanded. Then another chimed in, "Yes, give us a sign from heaven. We want proof You have come from God!"

Perhaps sighing, but looking intently in their direction, Christ responded, "Why does this generation seek a sign? You are a wicked and adulterous generation! The only sign you shall receive is that of the prophet Jonah!"

Jesus turned and walked away. This was only one of countless occasions that the religious leaders tempted and tested Him (Matt. 16:1-4).

Concerned with keeping their position and power, the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes—the religious elite of the day—were intimidated by Christ's teaching. They were unsettled by the throngs of people listening to Him. They were angered that people were following *Him*, and not *them*.

The revolutionary news of the coming kingdom of God threatened their positions. They knew this was a message about government. The Pharisees were the most threatened of all; some among this religious sect had been given minor government offices by the Romans. Though under a Roman king ruling over the district of Judea, the lower civil offices were important to them. These political offices brought power and prestige—and paid handsomely. In their minds, the announcement that Jesus brought jeopardized all of this.

Filled with fear, jealousy and contempt, they sought to counter Jesus at every opportunity. They could not let this subversive individual (as they assumed and claimed Him to be) continue His preaching unchecked.

These religious leaders, many of whom were politicians, felt they had to act if they were to retain their positions above the common people. They feared being accused of sedition by Rome, which meant summary execution. This self-seeking interest mandated that Christ's influence on the people be countered—even if it meant taking His life (John 11:47-50).

At every opportunity, the Pharisees opposed, persecuted and sought to frustrate Jesus (Luke 11:53-54). They deliberately rumored that He was born illegitimately, saying, "We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41). They called Him a self-promoter seeking a following (John 8:13). They said He was no better than a dog, and demon possessed (John 8:48; 7:20).

Their accusations were endless. When Jesus cast a demon out of a blind mute, restoring both his sight and speech, they claimed, "This

fellow does not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12:24)—that Christ's power to perform miracles came from the devil—putting themselves at risk for committing the unpardonable sin. They portrayed Him as uneducated and unlearned, lacking proper formal education and recognized credentials (John 7:15). They accused Him of being "a man gluttonous…a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. 11:19), a Sabbath breaker (Matt. 12:9-10) and a blasphemer (John 10:33).

Jesus was regularly in danger of losing His life (John 5:16, 18). Several times He narrowly escaped being stoned (John 8:59; 10:31).

On numerous occasions, the religious authorities sought to bait and trap Christ in words or deeds. Hoping to accuse Him of sedition, a group of Pharisees plotted how they might trick Him. They hoped to cause Him to say something that could be used against Him.

Employing flattery, the Pharisees' disciples insincerely inquired, "Teacher, we know You speak the truth of God's way without compromise. You do not care about a person's status in life; You treat all the same and speak the words they need to hear. Please tell us what You think about this matter for we know You will tell us rightly. Does the law say we must pay taxes to Caesar? Or should we not?"

But Jesus was not fooled. He knew their purpose was to cause Him to speak against the Roman government so they could accuse Him.

Jesus responded boldly, "Why do you try to trap Me in words, you hypocrites? Give Me a piece of money." Holding a coin up to their faces, He asked, "Whose likeness and words are stamped on this coin?"

"Caesar's," came their sheepish reply, knowing their ploy had not worked.

Jesus continued teaching them a hard lesson, commanding, "Then give to Caesar what belongs to him and give to God the things that are His."

Having been silenced, the frustrated disciples of the Pharisees walked away knowing they would have to report to their masters that their entrapment attempts had failed (Matt. 22:15-22; Luke 20:20-26).

Such was the resistance Jesus regularly faced.

Disbelief

The one thing most people can count on is family. Yet Jesus could not even rely on the support of His brothers. This became apparent after He returned to His home in Galilee because of the rising threat to His life from the religious authorities. It was shortly before the Feast of Tabernacles.

Not yet understanding who their brother was, they, in their unbelief, became frustrated over His refusal to publicly show His powers. "What are You doing here? Why don't You go to Judea? Go to Your students and show them Your mighty works. If You can do miracles, why do You hide? If You want to be known, then do Your miracles out in the open!"

Even among His family, there were times when He had no support. Christ knew what yet lay ahead. Jesus responded, "My time is not yet come, but your time is always here. The world does not hate you; but Me it hates, because I testify that this world's works are evil. You go up to this feast: I will come later because it is not yet My time."

Imagine how this must have felt—to be challenged even by family who did not understand. Christ's life was in constant danger. His brothers, who had no such worries, could not give even minimal comfort or support. They simply did not understand who He was, or His message.

Jesus was keenly aware that "a prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4).

Of course, certain of the common people would have also ridiculed Him. Because Jesus came from a town and region that were looked down upon—Nazareth in Galilee—comments about His heritage evoked sarcastic put-downs. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46), one man sneered upon hearing about Jesus.

Though masses followed Him wherever He went, not all cared about the words Jesus spoke, as emphasized earlier. Many, having heard of His feeding thousands, were more interested in the physical food available, which sustains only temporary life. Their minds were far away from understanding the spiritual food freely given to them that leads to eternal life.

One day after the feeding of the 5,000 men and families near the Sea of Galilee, Christ crossed over the waters into Capernaum. The crowds from the previous day found Him there. Then one came to Him, and said, "Rabbi, when did You get here? We have been searching for You."

Knowing why the people were searching for Him, Christ answered, "You have searched for Me because of the food I fed everyone with yesterday. You are not here because of the miracles I performed or the words I speak; you are here to be fed again. You are much too concerned with physical food that perishes. You ought to desire that food I freely give, which leads to everlasting life!"

Not comprehending His words, the people began to ask for more miracles and for bread, like the manna Moses had given their forefathers to eat in the Wilderness of Sinai. They did not understand that Christ *was* the unleavened Bread of Life. His sacrifice would make possible the gift of eternal life to all who would accept it and surrender to Christ's rule in their lives.

"Moses did not give them that bread from heaven," Jesus said to the crowd. "My Father gives you the TRUE BREAD from heaven. I AM that Bread of Life. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood," Jesus said, speaking of the soon-to-be-instituted Passover symbols, "will receive eternal life and will be resurrected at the last day!"

At those words, many began to express disbelief, asking, "What is He saying?" some said. "This is hard to understand. How can this Man give us His flesh to eat? How will that give us eternal life?" Christ's followers began to murmur. He explained further that "no man can come to Me, except those whom My Father calls."

Shaking their heads, "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6:66). Those who had seemingly expressed genuine interest in Jesus' message simply turned, walked away and followed Him no more.

Looking at the apostles-in-training, Jesus asked, "Will you also go away and forsake Me?"

Peter confidently replied, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life, where else would we go?"

Jesus—knowing of events yet to come and who would betray Him—replied, "Have I not chosen you twelve? But yet one of you is My enemy." He knew that more opposition, rejection and final betrayal were ahead.

A Pivotal Event

As the Pharisees' resentment of Christ grew, their desire to silence Him increased (John 11:53). Ultimately, their goal remained the same: to kill Him. This opportunity came in the spring of AD 31, during Passover, as Christ's earthly ministry was coming to a close (Matt. 26:1-4; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:37).

Judas Iscariot, giving in to the lust for money (John 12:3-6) and Satan's influence over him, schemed with the chief priests and scribes to deliver Jesus into their hands. As the Passover drew near, Judas approached them, and asked, "What will you give me and I will deliver Him unto you?" Judas was hoping for a monetary reward (Matt. 26:15-16).

This brought great joy to the chief priests—it was just what they had been hoping for! They agreed to pay him 30 pieces of silver (Mark 14:11).

Accepting their offer, Judas, from that point forward, “sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude” (Luke 22:6). His opportunity soon came.

Having instituted the new Passover symbols, Jesus began to focus on events that were just hours ahead. Would He be able to endure the extreme pain, suffering and abject humiliation? Could He complete the purpose for which He was born? Could there be another way to accomplish this pivotal step in God’s Plan of salvation?

Leaving the location where the Passover had been held, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane, as He had done many times; the disciples followed. Arriving at the garden, in the darkness of the night, “He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if You be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”

Christ was keenly aware of what was about to unfold. God sent an angel to strengthen Him.

Jesus’ prayers intensified. “And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:41-44). Three times Jesus prayed to God that there might be another way to pay for the sins of mankind: “O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Your will be done” (Matt. 26:42).

Yet, there was no other way. Jesus was ready to fully submit to His Father’s will.

Looking for support from His disciples during this agonizing period, Jesus instead found them sleeping. “What, could you not watch with Me one hour?” He asked. “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:40-41), He warned. The disciples were unaware of the tremendous trial about to come—one that would test their commitment and loyalty to Jesus to the utmost degree.

But Peter and the disciples had already forgotten Christ’s earlier warning (Matt. 26:31-34; Mark 14:27-30).

Returning from praying the third time, He found them asleep again. With urgency, Christ roused the disciples from their slumber. “Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that does betray Me” (Matt. 26:45-46).

Could Jesus Have Sinned?

Some believe Jesus Christ was incapable of sinning. They reason that since He was prophesied to succeed, it was impossible for Him to fail.

The Bible clearly reveals that Jesus divested Himself of the spiritual glory He previously possessed and became a flesh-and-blood human being. By doing this, He put Himself at risk of failing in His role as mankind's Savior. He was subject to the pulls of the flesh and had to overcome temptation to sin.

God in the Flesh

As a human being, Jesus was both fully God and fully human. Though He was God-in-the-flesh, He did not possess the full amount of glory He had in His former spiritual state as the Word (John 1:14), or the God of the Old Testament. This is made plain in John 17:5, from the Moffatt translation: "Father, glorify Me in your presence with the glory which I enjoyed in your presence before the world began."

Some believe Colossians 2:9—"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"—means that Christ had at His disposal full powers of a Spirit being. The Phillips Bible translation sheds light on this scripture by providing parenthetical commentary along with the biblical text: "Yet it is in Him that God gives a full and complete expression of Himself (within the physical limits that He set Himself in Christ)."

This explanation correctly shows that God had empowered Jesus to the full—but within the limitations of a physical being.

Overcoming in Death

On the night after His last Passover, Jesus stated, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Jesus had concluded His ministry and trained His disciples, who would become the nucleus of the Church. He was now prepared to die for the sins of the world.

When Christ died, His spirit (the "spirit in man" – Job 32:8) returned to God. A physical Christ did not die while a "spiritual phantom" of sorts continued to live, as some believe. Misunderstanding I Peter 3:18-19, some even think that Jesus preached to fallen angels in "hell" when He was dead in the grave for three days and three nights.

The Gnostic belief of Docetism, adhered to by many in the early centuries A.D., stated that Jesus did not have a human body. He supposedly *appeared* to have died on the cross. The physical Christ is said to have been a reflection of the real "Divine Christ" who remained in heaven. The Gnostics taught that the spiritual Christ continued to live while the inferior physical Christ died.

Yet Romans 14:9 states, "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." Only *one* Christ died and was resurrected—not two separate beings.

Probable, Not Infallible

In John 18:37, Pontius Pilate questioned Jesus: "Are you a king then? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears My voice."

A number of other scriptures (Matt. 17:1-9; I Pet. 1:18-21; John 11:25; Heb. 8:10, along with many references to the Old Testament prophets) stress the certainty of Christ's victory during His physical life, as well as the assurance of His future Millennial reign. Some have mistaken this certainty to mean there was no possibility of Christ failing.

If there were no danger in completing His earthly work, then why did Jesus fast for 40 days and nights (Matt. 4:2)? Why did He need to draw closer to His Father prior to confronting Satan? The Bible states that Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). If one is capable of being *tempted* to sin, then a possibility of sinning must exist!

Christ frequently cried out to God and offered up prayers and supplications, with tears (Heb. 5:7). It also states that He learned obedience through the things which He suffered (vs. 8). Does this sound as though there was no possibility of Jesus sinning?

Jesus not only carried out His ministry successfully—He also resisted temptation. By doing so, He qualified to be the perfect sacrifice, taking away the world's sins (John 1:29; I John 2:2). He endured the pressures and pulls of Satan, society and self—setting a perfect example for His servants to follow.

Going to the Source of Power

Why then did the Scriptures prophesy Jesus' victory beforehand? Because the perfect willpower and determination of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ meant that victory was all but certain!

Isaiah 59:15-17 reveals how Jesus was to fulfill His work: "Yes, truth fails; and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment. And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak."

This prophecy, along with many others, describes Jesus Christ's success in overcoming sin. Due to God's determination and strength, failure was not an option—though it was possible! Jesus knew that if He went to the Ultimate Source of power in the universe, He would receive all He needed to succeed.

Jesus Christ was vulnerable to temptation, subject to death and capable of sinning, and He carried out the greatest and most demanding ministry the world has ever seen. Only by relying on God's strength, not His own human power, was He able to overcome the *almost* insurmountable hurdles and roadblocks before Him.

Around midnight, Jesus turned and saw Judas approaching with a crowd. Among them were soldiers and officers carrying clubs and swords. Walking toward Jesus with open arms, Judas said, "Greetings, Teacher!" and then kissed Him. The signal was given; the deed was done.

Looking His betrayer in the eyes, Jesus asked, "Judas, do you betray me with a kiss?"

Several men wielding clubs and swords stepped forward. Treating Christ like a common criminal, they seized Him, and took Him away. Watching in disbelief, the disciples, still groggy from sleep, turned—forsaking their Master and Teacher—and fled!

Even Peter, who only hours before had vehemently declared he would never forsake Christ, denied Him three times in the coming hours (Mark 14:66-72).

Jesus was now on His own through the coming agonizing ordeal. But His heavenly Father would be there to strengthen Him.

The Trial Begins

Bound, and surrounded by unfriendly faces, the angry mob pushed and pulled Jesus as they led Him away in the darkness. They first arrived at the home of Annas, father-in-law of that year's High Priest, Caiaphas. Then Annas sent Him to Caiaphas.

Once there, Jesus began to face false accusers. One after the other came forward with fabricated and contradictory testimony. The chief priests and elders desperately wanted a reason to put Christ to death. And then two men claimed, "We heard this man say He was able to destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days!"

Standing up from his chair, his voice rising in anger, Caiaphas examined Jesus: "Did You say those words? Is their testimony true? Will You answer me or not?"

Jesus remained silent.

Becoming more incensed, the High Priest glared at Him. "I adjure You by the living God," he charged, "that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

Looking back at Caiaphas, Jesus answered, "What you have said is correct." Knowing what would come next, He continued, "Nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall you see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

His anger boiling over, Caiaphas tore his clothes and shouted, "Blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Now you have heard His blasphemy!"

He eagerly asked the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin, "What do you think?"

"He must be put to death!" they decreed in agreement. They did not understand that their minds were being used as tools of the devil—but also God's supreme purpose.

There stood Christ—a perfect, sinless human being, who, for telling the truth, was now sentenced to death by His own creation. Yet because He was filled with love for mankind, He was willing to endure much more.

The atmosphere rose to a fever pitch. Taunts, insults and blows came crashing down. Blindfolded, Jesus could not see the attacks coming. Time and again, they struck His face while spitting in it, and delivered painful strikes to His body. Blood and spit ran down His swollen face. Bruises from broken blood vessels began to show. Taunts rang in His ears: "Prophesy to us, You who claim to be Christ. Tell us, who hit You?"

As morning came, the chief priests and elders plotted how they would put Jesus to death—but who would do the deed for them (Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1)?

Facing Pilate and Herod

Having hatched their plan early in the morning, the religious leaders led Jesus to Pilate, hoping for a speedy execution. Once there, they accused Him before Pilate to make their case. "We found this man perverting the nation and forbidding the people to give tribute to Caesar, saying He was a king, Christ."

Pilate asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"It is as you say," Jesus replied.

Satisfied with Christ's answer, Pilate turned to the chief priests and said, "I find no fault in this Man."

This was not what they wanted to hear, so they began to plead their case more earnestly: "But He is a troublemaker! He stirs up all of the people, teaching throughout the land."

Hearing Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate thought he had a way out. *This is Herod's business, not mine*, he thought, so he ordered that Jesus be sent to Herod.

Having heard of His fame, Herod was pleased to see Jesus. *At last, I might see Him perform a miracle!* Herod questioned Him at length while the chief priests and scribes leveled their accusations.

Yet Christ stood still and kept silent.

Growing restless, Herod made sport of Him. "And [he] with his men of war [soldiers] set Him at naught [despised utterly], and

mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate" (Luke 23:11).

Again, the religious leaders accused Jesus before Pilate. But Pilate, perceiving their motives (Mark 15:10), desired to let Christ go.

"You brought this Man to me to put to death, but neither I nor Herod find any reason to do so. You have a custom that one be released for the Feast; let me first scourge Him and then I will let Him go," Pilate said, hoping to placate them.

"No!" they cried. "We do not want this Man—we want Barabbas!" Not believing his ears, Pilate appealed to the crowd: "Who would you have me release to you?"

"Give us Barabbas!" they shouted in unison. "Crucify Jesus!"

When Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has He done?", the crowd continued their frenzied cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (Luke 23:1-25).

Symbolically washing his hands of the matter, Pilate released Barabbas, a robber and murderer (Matt. 27:24). Beaten, bruised, swollen, weary and humiliated, the One who was innocent took the place of one deserving death.

"Marred More Than Any Man"

With Jesus' fate sealed, Pilate sent Him to be scourged and crucified—one of the most excruciating and reprehensible forms of death that man has ever devised.

While various forms of crucifixion were used, we will describe one possible method.

To begin the horrible ordeal, Jesus is stripped of His clothing and His hands are bound to a post above His head. A Roman legionnaire steps forward with a flagellum—a short whip with jagged pieces of bone, glass and metal tied into nine strips of leather. This gruesome instrument of torture is commonly referred to as a cat-o'-nine-tails.

The heavy whip is brought down without mercy, over and over again, across Jesus' shoulders, back and legs. At first, the flagellum cuts through the skin only. But as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the flesh, causing blood to ooze from the capillaries and veins. Blood then begins to spurt from smaller arteries in the underlying muscles.

The flagellum produces large, deep bruises, which are then ripped open by succeeding blows. In time, the skin of Jesus' back is hanging in long ribbons, like spaghetti. The entire area is an unrecognizable bloody mass of torn flesh.

Was Jesus Crucified on a Cross or a Stake?

This world's professing Christianity has traditionally taught that Christ died on a cross. Since Christ Himself warned against blindly following the traditions of men (Mark 7:6-7), we must not make assumptions.

Recognize that the cross has long been understood to be a symbol widely used by many pagan religions in various forms of sex worship. Its roots are ancient, with its original design being that of a line through a very narrow oval shape—which connotation is easy for the imagination to understand.

In the gospel accounts, the Bible says that Christ was nailed to a cross. The Greek word used for "cross" is *stauros*, which means "stake, pole, upright post or cross." Interestingly, other scriptures record that Christ was nailed to a "tree" (I Peter 2:24; Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29). The Greek word used in these passages is *xulon*, meaning "timber, stick, club, tree or other wooden article or substance."

In ancient times, Roman soldiers used to crucify people using wooden structures of various shapes. Sometimes they used upright stakes or poles. Other times they used wooden crosses by attaching beams either at or just below the top.

The Bible does not specify the exact shape of the "stauros" or "xulon" on which Christ was crucified. If God thought it was important for us to know, He clearly would have recorded it, leaving us no doubts. Christ may or may not have been crucified on a cross. The shape of the instrument is not important, but Christ's sacrifice is!

The severe beating is halted when the Roman centurion in charge has determined that Jesus is near death.

Under the proficiency of His tormentor, it was not long until Isaiah 52:14 was fulfilled: "Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men" (NKJV). Jesus was literally beaten beyond recognition. His appearance did not remotely resemble the popular idea of His Body on the stake.

Though the Jews had a law that prohibited more than 39 lashes, there is speculation that the Romans would not have made any attempt to obey the statute.

At this point, Jesus is close to being in shock. One can only imagine the agonizing pain pulsing throughout His nervous system. He is then untied from the post and allowed to fall to the ground—soaked in His own blood. The soldier performing the beating notices a great irony in a "simple, unsophisticated Jew" claiming to be a king. A robe is thrown across Jesus' shoulders, and a stick is placed in His hand, like a scepter. To complete the mockery, flexible branches covered with long thorns are formed into a crown and pressed firmly into Jesus' scalp. Since the scalp is one of the most vascular areas of the body, profuse bleeding begins almost immediately.

The soldiers proceed to mock Jesus and strike Him across the face. "Hail, King of the Jews" came the humiliating epitaphs. They then take His "scepter" and strike Him on the head—the thorns driven deeper. At last, the soldiers grow weary of their vicious attack and tear off Jesus' robe. This causes agonizing pain, similar to carelessly removing a surgical bandage, due to His robe having bonded to the clots of blood and serum in His wounds. Significant bleeding takes place once again, as though He were being whipped with the flagellum.

Terrible Struggle

Some cuts are so deep that His bones are visible. The beating is so severe, they are pulled out of joint (Psa. 22:14, 17)! Jesus took this beating so that "by [His] stripes [we may be] healed" (I Pet. 2:24). Our physical sins could now be forgiven.

Badly disfigured, Jesus is led into the street. Those who see Him are horrified.

Ironically, in respect of Jewish custom, the Roman soldiers return Jesus' garments, and then make Him carry a long wooden beam along His back. The condemned "criminal," along with the Roman soldiers, begins His slow journey to the site of the crucifixion, Golgotha. Jesus

struggles to walk uprightly, but considering the immense weight of the wooden beam and the state of near shock produced by incredible blood loss, He constantly falls. The weight is too much to bear. The beam gouges into the shredded skin and muscles of the shoulders. Jesus tries to rise, but the endurance of His muscles has been exceeded.

A soldier mercilessly barks, “Get up!”

Wanting to hasten the crucifixion, the centurion-in-charge selects an onlooker—Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32)—to carry the beam. Jesus follows behind Simon, perhaps slightly relieved, but still bleeding and in near physical shock.

Crucifixion

Finally, after a 650-yard journey (a little over one-third mile), they arrive at Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” on a hill just outside Jerusalem (Mark 15:15-22).

Simon is ordered to place the large beam on the ground, where a worn-out Jesus is thrown down with His shoulders against the wood. Then the legionnaire drives heavy square wrought iron spikes through His hands and deep into the wood. These were not the thin, smooth nails found at the neighborhood hardware store. Their entrance both cut through and displaced with crushing the tissue of hands and feet.

The legionnaires then raise the stake to which Christ is attached. At this point, Jesus’ body weight is held up by His spike-driven hands. Then His left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, both feet fully extended, toes down. A square spike pierces through the arch of each foot, leaving His knees flexed. As Jesus’ weight continues to sag downward, with more weight on His hands and feet, unbearable, fiery pain shoots along His fingers and up His arms. Tetany—extreme pain due to lack of oxygen to the tissues—sets in.

The torment continues without relief. With flies swarming over His festering wounds, His naked body racked with pain, those who look on jeer, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God” (Matt. 27:42-43).

Through parched lips and with a swollen tongue, Jesus utters the words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Unfazed by the magnitude of Christ’s suffering, the soldiers standing guard divide His garments by casting lots.

Did Jesus Die of a "Broken Heart"?

In the final hours of Jesus' death, He was nailed to a stake, positioned between two criminals also being crucified. At Pilate's command, Roman soldiers broke legs of the criminals to hasten their death. (Unable to heave themselves higher with their legs, they would slowly suffocate, unable to get air into crushed lungs.) When soldiers came to break Christ's legs, they discovered Him already dead (John 19:33). They were surprised; crucifixion was designed to be a torturous process intended to extend one's final hours so their last moments would be agonizing.

But Jesus had already died—why?

As with other myths and false teachings, an idea arose long after the gospel accounts were written and canonized: "Jesus died of a broken heart." In other words, "His heart ruptured under the emotional weight of being tortured, humiliated, rejected and scorned."

Those who believe this use the following "proof" to support their thinking: When a soldier had thrust a spear into Christ's side, blood and water gushed out—"evidence" (they claim) that tears had welled up and collected around Jesus' heart, and that when He was pierced, His "broken heart" could not take it anymore, bringing death.

But was Jesus so physically and emotionally weak that He could not endure what crucified criminals could? (Remember, their deaths were hastened; had their legs not been broken, the criminals would have stayed alive hours longer.)

Jesus was a carpenter for years before His earthly ministry began. He worked outside with His hands, arms and muscles, having to endure seasonal weather conditions. He obeyed God's laws of good health. Violating them would have disqualified Jesus from becoming man's sinless Savior. In addition, as a carpenter, His profession required good health. The livelihood of the family depended on it.

Then there is Jesus' ministry, which required that He travel from city to city, often long distances mostly by foot. He sometimes slept outdoors, breathing clean, fresh air. As He traveled,

He was subject to changing weather conditions—summer heat, arid deserts, storms at sea, etc. Christ had to be incredibly strong—mentally, physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually—to withstand the ongoing battles, trials from temptations from Satan, the scribes and Pharisees, unbelievers, and of course from His own flesh.

Obviously, Jesus Christ was not a weakling—far from it! His heart would not have suddenly "broken" under even extreme pressure. His had been a life of pressure and physical demands.

Then what did kill the Savior—what did cause Him to die?

The Passover Lamb

Let's switch to the first Passover, when the Israelites were in Egypt about to be delivered from slavery. God ordered each family to sacrifice a lamb. It had to be young, physically perfect (without blemish or defect), and without broken bones. Families were to roast and eat it. That Passover night, the Death angel "passed over" their homes, sparing the lives of those houses "sprinkled" with the blood of a lamb. The blood is what saved Israel's firstborn sons from death.

How did the Passover lamb die? We might ask if it could die "of itself." No, or God would have forbidden them to eat it: "And the fat of the beast that dies *of itself*, and the fat of that which is torn with beasts, may be used in any other use: but *you shall in no wise eat of it*" (Lev. 7:24). "That which dies *of itself*, or is torn with beasts, *he shall not eat to defile himself therewith*: I am the LORD." (Lev 22:8). "You shall not eat of anything that dies *of itself*: you shall give it unto the stranger that is in your gates, that he may eat it; or you may sell it unto an alien: *for you are an holy people unto the LORD your God*" (Deut. 14:21).

So how did the lamb die? "…the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it" (Ex. 12:6)—it was put to death! They put a knife to the lamb and shed its blood. THIS caused its death.

Return to considering Christ. As "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36), Jesus gave the supreme sacrifice. As with the original Passover lamb, which typed Him, Jesus was young (He died in His early 30s), perfect (like His Father – John 10:30; Matt. 5:48), innocent (without sin – Heb. 4:15), defenseless (by choice –

John 18:36; Acts 8:32), and His bones were not broken (John 19:33).

As with the Passover lamb, Christ was "stricken" (Isa. 53:8)—which means "a blow, stroke, wound, mark, to strike violently." He was slain—He did *not*, and *could not*, in any sense, die "of Himself."

Why? "For the transgression of My people was He stricken" (same verse). Mankind's sins (I John 3:4; Rom. 3:23) caused the death of God's Son (Rom. 6:23).

In the Blood

Remember, Isaiah 53:12 foretold critical elements of Jesus' death and sacrifice: "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because *He has poured out His soul unto death*: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

How did Christ "pour out His soul unto death"?

The word for "soul" in Hebrew is *nephesh*, meaning "a breathing creature," a "living being (with life in the blood)." Blood contains life *within it*: "Only be sure that you eat not the blood: for the *blood is the life*; and you may not eat *the life* with the flesh" (Deut. 12:23).

So when Jesus "poured out His soul unto death," He did so by pouring out His blood to the point where He could no longer live. He did not die of a "broken heart"—He bled to death! This is why He said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd *gives His life* for the sheep" (John 10:11).

A Missing Passage

Now let's study John 19. The passage reads as though it is in time sequence: (1) In verses 31-32, Pilate ordered his soldiers to speed up the deaths of those crucified by breaking their legs; (2) in verse 33, the soldiers intended to break Jesus' legs, but He was already dead; (3) the next verse states that a soldier pierced the side of the dead body, resulting in water and blood coming out.

Here is the point: If Christ was *already* dead when His blood came out, then He did not bleed to death—which means

the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 failed because Jesus did not "pour out His soul [contained in blood] unto death"—therefore, He was not "stricken" for the sins of mankind, paying the death penalty in man's stead, since He was no longer alive when He was pierced.

As with any aspect of careful Bible study, we must tie scripture to scripture, "precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little," like a spiritual jigsaw puzzle to get the full picture of any teaching (Isa. 28:9-10, 13).

Let's now tie John 19 with Matthew 27:46-50.

In verses 46-47, Jesus cried aloud from the cross: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" ("My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"). Onlookers thought He was calling for Elijah the prophet. While some wanted to give Jesus vinegar to drink, others said, "Let be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him" (vs. 49). The next verse states, "Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost [spirit]."

The *King James Version* of the Bible and most other translations record verses 49-50 similarly. However, a careful examination of the original Greek text reveals there is *another* sentence included in verse 49, missing from most Bible translations!

Note the *Fenton* translation: "But the others called out, 'Let Him alone! Let us see whether Elijah will come and save Him!' *But another taking a spear pierced His side, when blood and water came out.* Jesus, however, having again called out with a loud voice, resigned His spirit."

Now read *Moffatt*: "But the others said, 'Stop, let us see if Elijah does come to save Him!' (*Seizing a lance, another pierced His side, and out came water and blood.*) Jesus again uttered a loud scream, and gave up His spirit."

Adam Clarke's Commentary states this: "After this verse, BCL and five others add, *Another, taking a spear, pierced his side, and there came out blood and water*. Several of the fathers add the same words here: they appear, however, to be an interpolation from John 19:34."

A margin note in the *Revised Standard* states, "Other ancient authorities insert *And another took a spear and pierced His side, and out came water and blood*."

It was at THIS point when the Roman soldiers pierced Jesus' side—when He was still alive! It was for THIS reason Christ, in Matthew 27:50, "cried again with a loud voice, [and]

yielded up the ghost [spirit]”—He screamed in pain when the spear pierced His side!

John 19:34 did not happen *after* Jesus was dead. The verse is not written in time sequence with the preceding verses. The gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called “synoptic gospels.” They follow the same general timeframe of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry, and thus supplement each other in understanding the time sequence. But the book of John is different, emphasizing *themes* more than time sequence. In this case, the next two verses, including verse 34, were used to verify WHAT happened (the fulfillment of a prophecy), not the precise moment when it happened.

Blood and Water

When Jesus was pierced, blood and water gushed out—why? It was not water that came from Christ—it was urine. The soldier’s spear had pierced a number of internal organs, also causing Jesus to bleed massively. This in part explains why His corpse, even after being in the tomb for three days and three nights, had not yet decayed (Acts 2:27; 13:35). There was no blood in the body to corrupt the flesh!

Christ’s flesh was not supernatural or “other worldly.” He was mortal just like all men (Heb. 2:14), except He was God. When He, as the Word, became flesh, He “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8).

Consider this: Genesis 9:5-6 states, “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.”

Jesus died to pay for ALL the world’s transgressions against God’s Law, including murder (which includes hatred toward one’s neighbor—the spirit of murder – Matt. 5:21-22). He paid the penalty for those who have murdered, who have shed the blood of others, by shedding His own blood!

Jesus Christ is mankind’s Savior, not because He “died of a broken heart,” but because He literally poured out His life—His blood!—for the sins of humanity!

Completely Cut Off

Jesus had always been able to rely on His Father. He knew that through reliance on Him, and maintaining close personal contact through prayer, no trial or difficulty was too great to endure. During His ministry, Jesus' prayers were heard many times. He needed only to look back to His greatest miracle—raising Lazarus from the dead—and recall the words He spoke that day: "I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You hear Me always" (John 11:41-42).

Even when the mob came to arrest Him in Gethsemane, Jesus could have called on God's deliverance. "Think you that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53).

As dark clouds blocked out the afternoon light, it seemed Christ could not count on the Father, who had helped Him through the past 33½ years of physical life. Hanging from the stake, filled with horrific pain and in terrible anguish, having come to His greatest hour of need, He was left alone, completely abandoned.

At about 3:00 p.m., Jesus mustered what strength remained and cried out, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). These were not empty words. His cry reflected His innermost feelings. Jesus was fully human, even though God was His Father. He was born of a woman and was capable of feeling, in mind and body, all that any man could.

At that moment, Jesus experienced something He had never known. Having existed from eternity, first as the Word, and then in the flesh as the Son of God, He always had contact with the Father. And now, the realization hit. For the first time, He was completely alone—totally cut off from His Father. Their unbroken contact was now severed.

For "[God] had made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:21). Yes, "the Lord has laid on [Jesus] the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Jesus had all mankind's sins laid upon Him, becoming sin for us.

And because "your iniquities have separated you from your God… your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2, NKJV). The Father had no choice. Since He cannot compromise with sin, meaning He can have no interaction with it, it meant He was forced to forsake—to abandon—His beloved Son.

The pain becoming almost unbearable, Jesus Christ now comprehended what it meant to be cut off from God. Remembering how He had lived and taught His disciples that "I can of mine own self do nothing," the help that He had relied on so many times was no longer available. He knew that He—and He alone—was shouldering the totality of humanity's sins—*your* sins. And this meant He would face the last moments of His life on Earth fully cut off from the Father.

"It Is Finished"

Crushed, almost drained of life, gasping for breath, and with each cell of His body screaming in pain, "Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst" (John 19:28).

Reacting to Jesus' plea, someone retrieved a sponge, dipped it in sour wine and offered Him a drink. Hoping for a small amount of cool water to quench His thirst, He instead received foul-tasting vinegar (vs. 29; Matt. 27:48).

An onlooker said, "Leave Him alone, let us see if Elijah will come save Him."

Jesus' suffering was almost finished. His long, drawn-out trial for the sake of mankind was nearing its end. He had endured cruel mocking, savage beatings, taunts, humiliation, abandonment and total rejection. His formerly healthy body was a mangled mess of dislocated bones and joints, and bleeding flesh. He was barely recognizable to those who were close to Him.

Barely clinging to life, Jesus prepared Himself for what was to occur next. To all looking on, He proclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Then, a soldier standing by took his spear and thrust it into Christ's side. From this gaping wound poured "water"—urine—and blood (John 19:34). Only by shed blood can sin be forgiven (Lev. 17:11).

With one final agonizing scream, His lifeblood spilling to the ground, Jesus of Nazareth—the Savior of man—cried, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Jesus Christ breathed His last breath.

Was Jesus' Trial Legal?

It is just after midnight on the Passover of AD 31. An ominous gathering of people, wielding swords and clubs, has assembled in the midst of Jesus and His disciples on the Mount of Olives, their intent mostly unknown. A man named Judas steps forward from the multitude and greets Jesus with a kiss, saying, "Good evening, Master."

Jesus responds, "My friend. Why are you here tonight?"

Immediately, several members of the large crowd move forward and seize Jesus, prompting one of His disciples to grab a sword and strike one of the attackers.

"Put down your sword," Jesus exclaims. "It is of no value. Those who rely on swords will die with their swords in hand. They are of no use. If I wanted to, I could call upon My Father to send more than 70,000 angels to free Me. But if this were to happen, the Scriptures would not be fulfilled."

Then Jesus says to the crowd, "Why have you seized Me tonight with swords and clubs, as if I were a criminal? Did you not see Me many times teaching in the temple? Why did you not lay hands upon Me then?"

At that very moment, Jesus' disciples—His close friends, who have been with Him for the better part of three and a half years—flee. Every one of them forsook Him, as it is written, "I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matt. 26:31).

Jesus is eventually taken to the palace of the high priest, whose name is Caiaphas. There, a sizeable group of scribes and Pharisees is anxiously assembled. For years, Jesus' popularity among the common people of Judea has threatened their positions of authority. Now, they finally have a chance to try Jesus and convict Him of a crime, one punishable by death.

After reading the previous chapter, you are familiar with the rest of the story: Jesus is tried, convicted and put to death. But have you ever closely examined the court proceedings leading to Jesus' crucifixion? Was His trial legal?

Commonly Held Views of the Trial

Many believe and try to prove that Jesus was legally put to death. For example, in his 1916 book *The Prosecution of Jesus*, Richard Wellington Husband, a lawyer, wrote, "The arrest was legal…The hearing by the Sanhedrin was legal…The course of trial in the Roman court was legal…The conviction was legal, and was justified."

Here is how Husband supports his assertions: "The arrest was legal, for it was conducted by the proper officers, acting under instruction from the Sanhedrin. There was no illegality in the circumstances under which the arrest was affected. The hearing by the Sanhedrin was legal, for it was merely a preliminary hearing, and was not a formal trial. The course of trial in the Roman court was legal, for it harmonized with the procedure shown in the sources to be pursued by governors of provinces in hearing criminal cases."

"The conviction was legal, and was justified provided the evidence was sufficient to substantiate the charges, and the records do not prove the contrary."

As you can see, according to Husband, the entire process leading to the death of Jesus was legal. And, to him, the Bible does not provide sufficient evidence to indicate otherwise, as he states that other "records do not prove the contrary."

Similarly, Max Radin, a former professor and author of the book *The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth*, believes the accounts in the Bible are not credible, since Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were not physical eyewitnesses to the secretive proceedings. In his book, Radin claims there is "no clear statement of how the knowledge of the trial came to those who reported it."

The author, however, does not take into account the possibility that Christ could have explained everything to His disciples when He was resurrected from the dead. Jesus was a personal eyewitness to the trial

and could have accurately conveyed everything to His followers to record in the pages of the Bible. (Of course, the author also does not believe that Scripture is inspired.)

Later in the book, Radin provides insight into a common trial in Judea during Christ's time: "We are, most of us, familiar with the procedure of criminal investigations. The accused person is arrested, arraigned before a committing magistrate, specifically accused and formally tried. He may, and he generally does, appeal to a higher court, if he is convicted. All these things take time, and there is almost necessarily an interval of weeks and months between the later stages of the procedure. But above all, the procedure is strictly regulated by law, and any serious deviation is not merely an irregularity but will probably prevent punishment from being inflicted."

By the above description alone, Jesus' trial was fraudulent. All of the above-mentioned events take time, and usually lots of it! Radin himself admits this. But the trial of Jesus was completed approximately nine hours after He was arrested. And due to the privacy of the proceedings, there were no witnesses to testify on behalf of Jesus—but there were many witnesses to testify *against* Him! How many court cases are you aware of that are similar to this? Almost certainly none.

Several pages later in the book, Radin attempts to reconcile his description of a lengthy criminal investigation with Jesus' nine-hour process: "Mark's version, even by his own testimony, cannot be more than a guess. Instead of a hurried night meeting, a harsh and brief interrogatory, a disregard of established rules of evidence and procedure, the trial may have been formally correct, and the judgment formally correct even from the point of view of an upright judge just though severe."

As is the case with most scholars, Radin dismisses the Bible as a source of historically accurate information. He assumes that Mark guessed what "may have" happened and, as such, believes the investigation could have occurred some other way. Yet the accounts in the Bible are the only sources of information that cover the trial. One cannot justify his position based on another resource; he can merely render a guess or an assumption. When one believes what was written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—all very close to the proceedings—only one conclusion can be drawn: Christ's trial was illegal, even by men's standards.

What Was the Charge?

Some might wonder: "Why did the Jews deliver Jesus to the Romans to be killed? Could they not have put Him to death themselves?"

A common view of these matters is that the Jews did not have the authority to execute criminals. Continuing in *The Prosecution of Jesus*, Husband states, "According to the common view, the right to try capital cases [cases involving the death penalty] and even the right to pronounce sentences, still rested with the Sanhedrin, but the actual penalty could not be inflicted until the governor had given his sanction."

Those who believe Jesus' adversaries had no legal basis to execute Him usually cite John 18:31, where Pilate, the Roman governor, said to the Jews, "Take you Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, *It is not lawful for us to put any man to death*."

Lifted from its context, this verse does appear to indicate that the Jews were unable to execute criminals. Yet the truth is that they *did* have the power to try, convict and execute people, *except* in cases that involved treason or sedition against the Roman government.

Consider the following: Stephen was accused of blasphemy and as a result was stoned to death by the Jewish authority, as described in the book of Acts (6:11; 7:59). The Romans were not consulted in this execution and there is no indication they disapproved.

On several occasions, the scribes and Pharisees sought to kill Jesus (Mark 11:18; 14:1; Luke 19:47; 22:2; John 10:31). If this were illegal, it is doubtful they would have even attempted to do so.

In one instance, elders of Judea brought before Jesus a woman who had been caught committing adultery, and challenged, "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say you?" (John 8:5). If the Jews did not have the authority to put this woman to death, Jesus might have replied, "Are you not aware of Roman law? You do not have the power to execute anyone."

But He did not say this. He simply said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (vs. 7). Jesus knew full well that the Jews were legally able to execute adulteresses and criminals. Also, if it were not legal for the Jews to perform executions, consider what might have happened if word of this event reached Roman authority? Surely, if such were the case, the Jews would not have been so public about it.

Finally, although he survived, the apostle Paul was stoned by a crowd in Asia, among whom were Jews.

Wherever the Jews settled during the time of Roman rule, they had the legal right to execute people under their law.

So then to what is the statement in John 18:31 referring? "From the earliest period the Roman governor took cognizance of all mat-

ters that had relation to the public security or the majesty of the Empire. Consequently there was not a time at which the Roman magistrate would not step in when a charge of treason was made, or a seditious movement began. The case against Jesus is one especially in point, for the charge against him [treason] could under no circumstances be tried by any tribunal except that of the governor" (*The Prosecution of Jesus*).

The Roman government would intervene in criminal affairs only when matters of treason, civil disobedience, incitement to revolution or attacks against Caesar were specifically involved. Otherwise, local administration was conducted by local officials and the regular courts of the conquered nations. Roman authorities were not involved in every criminal proceeding throughout the vast empire.

Jesus' opponents accused Him of blasphemy, but since they did not want to execute Him themselves, they created charges of treason against Him. This way, the trial could be brought before Pontius Pilate, and, in their minds, he and the Romans would be responsible for Jesus' death, not them.

Events Leading to Jesus' Death

Before identifying the precise reasons Jesus' trial was illegal, it will be helpful to briefly examine events leading up to His crucifixion.

We begin again with Judas Iscariot striking a deal with the religious authorities. Here is the account: "Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve [disciples]. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him [Jesus] unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray Him unto them in the absence of the multitude" (Luke 22:3-6).

Soon after Judas entered into a pact with the religious leaders, Jesus and His faithful disciples ate their final meal together on Passover evening. Then, Judas arrived at the Mount of Olives with a large mob of various people, including Jesus' future judges and jury, who stirred up the crowd to arrest Christ (Luke 22:8-39).

After the arrest, a former high priest named Annas examined Jesus first (John 18:13). Next, the mob brought Jesus to the high priest's palace, where Caiaphas (the high priest) and the Sanhedrin were gathered (Matt. 26:57-58). Here, numerous false witnesses came before the Sanhedrin to give testimony against Him. Eventually, Jesus was condemned to death, apparently on the charge

of blasphemy (vs. 65-66). The next morning, the Sanhedrin formally condemned Jesus in an attempt to make the previous evening's procedures legal. A multitude of people then led Jesus to Pilate (Luke 23:1) and pronounced *different* charges, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King" (vs. 2). Notice that they did not accuse Christ of *blasphemy* in the presence of Pilate. Instead, they charged Him with *treason* against the Roman Empire.

Pilate initially desired to free Jesus (vs. 4), but the people continued to push for His death, saying, "He stirs up [incites] the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place" (vs. 5).

Recall when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod, since Galilee was under his jurisdiction (vs. 6-7). Herod was happy to see Jesus, as he heard many things about Him. He desired to see Jesus perform some miracles (vs. 8). But Jesus neither performed any miracles nor answered his questions (vs. 9). Meanwhile, the chief priests and scribes stood by and accused Jesus (vs. 10). After being mocked, He was quickly sent back to Pilate (vs. 11).

Pilate sought to release Jesus once again, as he found no reason to condemn Him to death: "You have brought this Man unto me, as one that perverts the people: and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof you accuse Him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him" (vs. 14-16).

But the crowd cried out with a loud voice, "Crucify Him, crucify Him" (vs. 21).

Pilate, a third time, responded to the multitude, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go" (vs. 22).

The people responded all the more loudly: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

Pilate finally gave in to the people's demands, and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

Keep in mind again that this entire process lasted only about nine hours, from after midnight to around 9:00 in the morning. Jesus was seized, then tried, condemned and crucified—all within a matter of nine hours! At 3:00 in the afternoon, Jesus was speared in His side and killed (John 19:34).

In that short period of time, the world eliminated the Savior!

With this backdrop, we are now ready to examine 12 paramount—and clear—reasons the arrest, trial and conviction of Jesus Christ were *illegal*.

First Reason

Recall that Judas was bribed to betray Jesus in the absence of the crowds who favored Him. The plan was to seize Jesus in the dark of night, sentence Him just before sunrise—to make everything appear legal—transport Him to Pilate, stir up a mob of people to condemn Him, and crucify Him in the morning before those who supported Him were aware.

Who constituted the crowd of people who arrested Jesus? The answer leads to the first maneuver contrary to law in Jesus' arrest, trial and conviction: *Jesus was arrested illegally*.

Any trial may be dismissed as a mistrial, or illegal, if there is prejudice against the individual being tried on the part of those participating. The accused must be given full recourse of law to be able to sufficiently present his side.

Jesus, however, was both arrested and tried by those prejudiced against Him, and was not allowed opportunity to present His case. Further, His judges were the same individuals who bribed Judas! Surely one cannot say these people were impartial!

In addition, Jesus was arrested secretly at night and was not formally charged of any offense. Judas simply pointed out Jesus, and a crowd arrested Him. There was no legal basis for this.

In his book *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*, Samuel Mendelsohn states, "The testimony of an accomplice [in this case, Judas] is not permissible by Rabbinic law…and no man's life, nor his liberty, nor his reputation can be endangered by the malice of the one who has confessed himself a criminal."

Since Judas accepted a bribe from a judge, certainly Judas would be considered a criminal. And since Jesus' judges bribed Judas, they would be considered criminals as well. This alone should have led to a mistrial!

Second Reason

Jesus was examined by Annas in a secret night proceeding (John 18:12-14, 19-23).

According to the Talmud, the Sanhedrin is forbidden from convening between the time of the evening and morning sacrifice. In

the book *Jesus Before the Sanhedrin*, M.M. Lemann states that "no session [including a preliminary examination] of the court could take place before the offering of the morning sacrifice."

Going further, "An accused man was never subjected to private or secret examination," as stated in *Institutions de Moise*, by J. Salvador.

Third Reason

The indictment against Jesus was false.

In the book *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim states that "the Sanhedrin did not, and could not, originate charges."

But as we saw, the Sanhedrin did so in the case against Jesus.

Alexander Taylor Innes, in *The Trial of Jesus Christ*, reveals that "until they [the witnesses] spoke, and spoke in the public assembly, the prisoner was scarcely [never] an accused man. When they spoke, and the evidence of two agreed together, it formed a legal charge, libel or indictment, as well as the evidence for its truth."

In a correctly conducted procedure, the evidence of the leading witnesses constituted the charge. But with Jesus, no witnesses—and therefore no charges—were presented at the outset of the proceedings. Those in opposition to Jesus, including those who would be in the court, simply arrested Him. They then needed to find witnesses—false ones!

Fourth Reason

The Sanhedrin court illegally held its trial before sunrise.

Annas's preliminary examination of Jesus resulted in no evidence. But instead of dismissing the case, the Sanhedrin proceeded to hold an illegal court.

Mendelsohn reveals why it was illegal: "Criminal cases can be acted upon by the various courts during the day time only, and by the Lesser Sanhedrins from the close of the morning sacrifice till noon, and by the Great Sanhedrin till evening."

The Jewish *Mishna* states, "Let a capital offense be tried during the day, but suspend at night."

Moses Maimonides explains why trials are to be held during the daylight: "The reason why the trial of a capital offense could not be held at night is because…the examination of such a charge is like the diagnosing of a wound—in either case a more thorough and searching examination can be made by daylight."

Convicting someone of a crime punishable by death was serious business. It required those deciding the fate of the accused to be at their best mental state, which is hardly true in the early hours of the morning.

Fifth Reason

The Sanhedrin illegally convened to try a capital offense on a day before an annual Sabbath.

The *Mishna* reveals why: "They shall not judge on the eve of the Sabbath, nor on any festival."

In *Martyrdom of Jesus*, Isaac Wise, a Jewish Rabbi, provides decisive evidence: "No court of justice in Israel was permitted to hold sessions on the Sabbath or on any of the seven biblical Holy Days. In cases of capital crime, no trial could be commenced on Friday or the day previous to any Holy Day, because it was not lawful either to adjourn such cases longer than overnight, or to continue them on the Sabbath or Holy Day."

Jesus, however, was arrested on Passover evening in AD 31, which is the day before the First Day of Unleavened Bread—an annual Holy Day!

Sixth Reason

The trial concluded in one day.

Again, reading from the *Mishna*, we learn, "A criminal case resulting in the acquittal of the accused may terminate the same day on which the trial began. But if a sentence of death is to be pronounced, it cannot be concluded before the following day."

Forcing a trial to continue longer than one day allows time for witnesses in support of the accused to come forth. Of course, Jesus' court did not want any such witnesses to manifest themselves, so they ended it quickly.

Seventh Reason

In addition to the indictment against Jesus being false, it was used illegally.

Jesus was indicted on the basis of one statement with no supporting evidence. Here is what transpired:

Two false witnesses testified that Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands" (Mark 14:58). This was used as the

indictment against Jesus. However, it was false. Jesus never said this! Rather, He stated, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19).

Notice Jesus did not say, “*I will* destroy this temple…” He said, “Destroy this temple…” Second, He did not say “…that is made with hands…” or “…build another made without hands.” These subtle differences completely change the meaning of His statement—and the false witnesses knew this. They portrayed Jesus as planning to destroy the physical Temple in Jerusalem. But this was far from the meaning of His words—referring to His death and resurrection!

Jesus’ statement in John 2:19 was a response to those who asked Him to give a sign (vs. 18). He was not referring to the physical Temple being destroyed; rather, He was talking about His Body—that three days after He would be put to death He would rise from the grave. By cunningly rephrasing His statement, the false witnesses were able to bring an indictment against Jesus.

Next, the high priest arose, and said to Jesus, “Are You not going to answer? Do You have anything to say about these charges?”

Jesus said nothing.

Then the high priest exclaimed, “I command You in the name of the living God: Tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Jesus answered, “You have said correctly. Nevertheless, you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

Immediately, the high priest tore his clothes, and shouted, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses? You are witnesses to His blasphemy. What do all of you think?”

“He is deserving of death!” everyone shouted in unison (Matt. 26:62-66).

Notice that the high priest’s question was completely unrelated to the indictment brought by the false witnesses. Instead of condemning Jesus on the charge of supposedly threatening to destroy the Temple and rebuild it three days later, the court condemned Him on a *separate* charge—that He claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus was indicted on one charge, tried on a separate charge, and condemned on His own testimony.

Jewish scholar Maimonides has this to say: “We have it as fundamental principle of our jurisprudence, that no one can bring an accusation against himself. Should a man make confession of guilt before a legally constituted tribunal, such confession is not to be used against him unless properly attested by two other witnesses” (*Sanhedrin*, IV, 2).

Yet, Jesus *was* condemned on account of His personal testimony, which was supposedly blasphemous. Furthermore, the court failed to examine Him to see whether His reference to being the Son of God could be considered blasphemy!

Max Radin reveals why Jesus' testimony was not blasphemous: "The blasphemy which the Pentateuch [first five books of the Old Testament] mentions is a literal cursing of God or a direct defiance of him. The only pentateuchal reference makes this clear. It is in Leviticus, chapter 24, and the incident which gave rise to the statute indicates the character of the offense of blasphemy in Jewish law. The half-Egyptian had cursed God…as under the circumstances of the quarrel there described, he would have been likely enough to do. No such thing could have been charged against Jesus by his most inveterate enemies" (*The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth*).

Notice another violation of law: "No attempt is ever made to lead a man on to self-incrimination. Moreover, a voluntary confession on his [the defendant's] part is not admitted in evidence, and therefore not competent to convict him, unless a legal number of witnesses minutely corroborate his self-accusation" (Mendelssohn, *Criminal Jurisprudence of the Ancient Hebrews*).

Yet again, in Jesus' case, the court violated its own law! The Sanhedrin illegally used Jesus' own assertion that He is the Son of God as evidence against Him.

Eighth Reason

The condemnation of Jesus was illegal because the merits of the defense were not considered.

Immediately after hearing Jesus declare that He was the Son of God, the high priest shouted, "He has spoken blasphemy." That was it—there was no diligent inquiry to follow. This despite what is stated in the *Mishna*: "The judges shall weigh the matter in the sincerity of their conscience."

It should be apparent that this did not occur in the case of Jesus. The high priest and all present *immediately* formed an opinion. There was no further investigation to see if He did in fact blaspheme.

In addition, the high priest tore his clothes during the trial (Mark 14:63; Matt. 26:65). But in Leviticus 21:10, we find that he is forbidden to do so: "And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, *nor rend his clothes*." (Also read Leviticus 10:6.)

The high priest tore his clothes to incite fury and prejudice in those present. He should have remained calm to avoid hampering the ability of others to render a sound judgment.

Put simply: A mob spirit condemned Jesus! (See Exodus 23:2.)

Here is what Mendelssohn states concerning this type of procedure: "A simultaneous and unanimous verdict of guilt rendered on the day of the trial has the effect of an acquittal."

The *Mishna* indicates that the proper method of voting was for "the judges each in his turn to absolve or condemn."

"The members of the Sanhedrin were seated in the form of a semicircle at the extremity of which a secretary was placed, whose business it was to record the votes. One of these secretaries recorded the votes in favor of the accused, the other against him."

But there is other important explanation of process. In *Criminal Code of the Jews*, Philip Benny wrote, "In ordinary cases the judges voted according to seniority, the oldest commencing; in a capital case, the reverse order was followed. That the younger members of the Sanhedrin should not be influenced by the views or the arguments of their more mature, more experienced colleagues, the junior judge was in these cases always the first to pronounce for or against conviction."

Clearly, none of this occurred in Jesus' trial.

Ninth Reason

Jesus being condemned by only part of the Sanhedrin was illegal because those who would have voted against the guilty verdict were not present.

We know that at least one member of the Sanhedrin during Jesus' trial was not present: Joseph of Arimathaea. In Luke 23, we learn the following: "And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counselor; and he was a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews…" (vs. 50-51).

Most Greek scholars agree that the word *counselor* refers to a member of the Sanhedrin. Interestingly, however, Joseph was not present during Jesus' trial. All who were there unanimously condemned Him, but Luke indicates Joseph "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them." This means he was absent from the proceedings—which was illegal! In setting up a secret night meeting to try Jesus, those who wanted to put Him to death ensured that His supporters would not be present to sidetrack their wicked intentions.

Also consider that "if none of the judges defend the culprit, i.e., all pronounce him guilty, having not defender in the court, the verdict guilty was invalid and sentence of death could not be executed" (*Martyrdom of Jesus*).

Tenth Reason

Jesus' sentence was illegally pronounced in a place forbidden by law.

After being seized by a mob, Jesus was eventually brought to the high priest's house to be tried (Luke 22:54). Yet Jewish law expressly *forbids* an individual from being tried anywhere but in the court. Notice what the Talmud states: "After leaving the hall Gazith [the court] no sentence of death can be passed upon anyone soever."

Maimonides adds, "A sentence of death can be pronounced only so long as the Sanhedrin holds its sessions in the appointed place" (*Sanhedrin*, XIV).

Eleventh Reason

Most members of the Sanhedrin were disqualified from legally trying Jesus.

Consider what Mendelsohn wrote in *Hebrew Maxims and Rules*: "The robe of the unfairly elected judge is to be respected not more than the blanket of the [donkey]."

In the Bible and the works of Jewish historian Josephus, we find the names of many of those who served on the Sanhedrin during Jesus' time. According to Josephus, these men—Caiaphas, Mathias, Ishmael, Simon, John, Alexander, Ananias, among others—received bribes, bought their offices and were appointed by those who should not have been on the court themselves. These things alone disqualified them!

Also, there were 12 former high priests serving on the Sanhedrin. The Bible, however, clearly requires that a man serve in this office throughout his entire lifetime. Only death would end his term. Contrary to the biblical pattern, Roman law permitted high priests to be voted into office each year.

Another reason the judges were disqualified is due to their status as enemies of the accused: "Nor must there be on the judicial bench either a relation, or a particular friend, or an enemy of either the accused or the accuser" (*Hebrew Maxims and Rules*).

This is corroborated by Philip Benny: "Nor under any circumstances was a man to be at enmity with the accused person permit-

ted to occupy a position among his judges" (*Criminal Code of the Jews*).

Yet those on the court were BITTER ENEMIES of Jesus—and even bribed someone to betray Him!

Twelfth Reason

The initial charge of blasphemy was illegally switched to sedition.

Earlier, we saw that, though they had legal authority to execute Him, the Sanhedrin decided to bring Jesus before Pontius Pilate on the charge of sedition. Initially, Jesus' opponents accused Him of blasphemy. But since they were afraid of their fellow Jews and did not want to execute Him themselves, they needed to switch the charge to treason against the Roman government, as we saw in Luke 23: "And they began to accuse Him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King" (vs. 2).

If the Sanhedrin had come to Pilate with the charge of blasphemy against Jesus, the governor would have told them to deal with Him according to their law. The case would have been dismissed. But since the Sanhedrin changed the charge to treason against the Roman government, Pilate was forced to listen to the case.

In the end, after several attempts to let Jesus go, and being threatened with possibly losing his position (John 19:12), Pilate reluctantly gave in to the mob's demands. Interestingly, however, he did not render a formal decision. Notice Pilate's final words in the trial: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see you to it" (Matt. 27:24).

No judgment against Jesus was rendered. Pilate ended the trial by turning Jesus over to his soldiers to carry out the true motive of the Jewish leaders—to have Jesus put to death on account of supposed blasphemy, *not* sedition (John 19:7).

An Innocent Man—Condemned!

Clearly, the entire trial of Jesus was a debacle—conducted illegally from start to finish. The facts are most plain.

Put yourself in Jesus' place for a moment: Imagine being betrayed by someone you were close to. Also imagine facing a trial you know is a sham. Next imagine being vehemently falsely accused. Then imagine being spitefully treated by thrill-seeking soldiers. Still further imagine enduring fierce scorn and ridicule from

ignorant people. And finally imagine facing one of the worst forms of execution mankind has ever devised!

All this despite being COMPLETELY INNOCENT!

A Man who had never sinned was unjustly sentenced to death for crimes He did not commit. He was condemned by a mob as a criminal—ironically by those who could themselves be considered criminals.

Yet, His death was absolutely necessary…

Why Is a Savior Necessary?

It is the most central tenet of Christianity: Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind, was buried in a tomb, and was resurrected three days later (I Cor. 15:3-4). Of the more than two billion people who profess to be Christian, most agree with this biblical teaching.

In fact, most churches focus entirely on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and that He is the Savior of the world. Of course, these points are true. Their ministers preach incessantly about Jesus' shed blood for our sins. They tell the masses to "give their hearts to Jesus" and to accept Him as their personal Savior. This, they say, is the only way to avoid roasting forever in hellfire. Once a person "accepts Jesus," they believe he or she is guaranteed a "place in heaven."

There is constant talk about God's mercy and of His "free gift" of salvation through the death of Jesus to anyone who will accept it. To these preachers, no form of obedience is necessary—only that one accepts Jesus into his heart. After all, God is full of grace and mercy. *Surely He will endlessly forgive all of my sins*, the thinking goes.

Lost in all of this is the *real* reason Jesus died. Most simply do not understand the tremendous price that was paid—why it was necessary that someone pay it—and the intended goal.

Made Into Flesh

First, some review. The book of John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The

same was in the beginning with God" (1:1-2). These verses reveal that two Beings existed "in the beginning." One is the Word; the other is God. Just this background strips away certain myths in revealing the origin of the true Jesus Christ.

Further, we see that the Word was also God, meaning that the Word is an eternal Being, since He is God. But He (the Word) is separate from God, meaning the Father. He existed in the beginning *with* God. Thus, two eternal Beings—not one "triune" being, as most assume—are mentioned here. "The Word was *with* God" clearly shows this fact.

The Word is the same Being called YHVH in the Old Testament—the Being who interacted with ancient Israel, who thundered the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai. We do not know the pronunciation of this word. It was regarded as so sacred in ancient Judah that no one would utter it.

Yet we do know the word's meaning: the "self-existent" One or "the Eternal." In other words, the Being known as YHVH in ancient Israel has existed forever—for all eternity. He is an eternal Spirit Being, having neither beginning of days nor end of life. He was never brought into existence and cannot die. Life is inherent within Him, as seen in verse 4: "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men."

The Word was instrumental in re-creating the Earth nearly 6,000 years ago. He is the One who "spoke, and it was done" (Psa. 33:9) and said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). Then, using the Holy Spirit (the power that emanates from God, not a third person of a trinity), "there was light." Verse 3 of John reveals that the Word was the Being who created not just the Earth, but *all things*, including the immense universe with its trillions of stars and planets: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made."

Yet, long ago, it was determined that the Word—the ever-living One who created all things—must die (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 13:8). For this to happen, He had to divest Himself of His eternal life and become a flesh-and-blood human being, born of a woman.

This brings us to John 1:14: "And the Word was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." This verse has perplexed millions throughout the ages. *How could God become a human being?*, many wonder.

But there it is in plain English: "the Word was made flesh," or *became* flesh. All one must do is believe it. Exactly *how* God was

converted from Spirit into flesh is beyond human comprehension, but that He became a literal human being is not.

When He became flesh, the Word was named Jesus: "And she [Mary] shall bring forth a son, and you shall call His name JESUS" (Matt. 1:21).

The Greek word for Jesus comes from the Hebrew word *yehoshua*, which means "he will save" or "YHVH is salvation." This name was not given by accident. It reveals that Jesus, formerly known as the Word, was born for a particular purpose: to save. We see this in the second part of verse 21: "He shall *save* His people from their sins." Jesus was born for the purpose of saving human beings.

Yes, Jesus was a human being. When He was changed into flesh, the life that kept Him alive resided in the blood, as is the case with all human beings (Lev. 17:11). When a person inhales, oxygen eventually enters the bloodstream and oxygenates the blood, thus making life possible. Like all fleshly humans and other creatures, Jesus relied on His blood for life. He no longer had eternal life residing within Himself. Without blood, Jesus would not have been able to exist. When He was crucified, Jesus' life went out of Him in His blood. He shed *blood*, not *spirit*.

Jesus was also fully God—He was human (born of a woman) *and* divine (begotten by the Father). He was "God with us" (Matt. 1:23) in the flesh. The Word did not merely enter into a fleshly body and become God inside of, and separate from, His human body. He was God "manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16). "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14).

In other words, Jesus was flesh and blood, just like any other human being! Why? For the purpose of being subject to death! So "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil…For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels [Jesus was not composed of spirit]; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham [became flesh and blood]. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like *unto His brethren* [flesh and blood]…to make reconciliation [through death] for the sins of the people" (vs. 14, 16-17).

At His birth, Jesus took on the nature of a human being (though He possessed the Holy Spirit without measure). He was tempted in all points just as we are (Heb. 4:15), and He suffered throughout His life, as we do. He was forced to endure and resist the pulls of the flesh. God became man so that He could live a perfect, sinless life

and die. His shed blood—His sacrifice—would free us from eternal death (the penalty for sinning – Rom. 6:23) and allow the possibility of our receiving eternal life. Without Jesus' death, there would be no hope for mankind beyond the grave—everyone would die in his sins, and remain dead for eternity.

Dead?—or Alive Somewhere Else?

Tens of millions—if not billions—believe that when Jesus was in the grave for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40), He was not truly dead. They contend that Jesus was actually alive, that only His physical body was dead.

Yet the Scriptures plainly reveal that Jesus died and was buried in the grave, and was not conscious. When Jesus rose three days and three nights later, He did not rise from *life*! He rose from death! Notice Romans 14:9: "For to this end Christ both *died*, and *rose*, and *revived*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living."

Two important points emerge from this scripture: (1) Through His death and resurrection, Jesus became Lord (Greek: "to rule, have dominion over, exercise lordship over") of the living and the dead. He paid the penalty for our past sins and opened the door for both the dead and the living to receive eternal life; (2) Jesus rose from a state of unconsciousness (death).

Most overlook the word "revived" in this passage. But its meaning clearly shows that Jesus rose from *death*, not *life* as most believe. The Greek word translated revived is *anazao*, and it means to "recover life, live again, revive." When Jesus rose, His life was recovered from death—He lived again! He did not *continue* living, as He was previously dead—in a state of physical and mental inactivity! Ecclesiastes 9:5 applied to Jesus, just like all human beings: "For the living know that they shall die: *but the dead know not any thing* [because they are not conscious], neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." (Also see verse 10.)

Think of it like this: While buried in the grave, Jesus was as much "out of it" as a boxer who is knocked out cold. But Jesus was not only unconscious, He was dead. He was one step beyond a boxer. Yet like a boxer, Jesus was *revived* back to a state of awareness!

Why then do so many oppose the Word of God and believe that Jesus died only physically, that He continued living as a spirit somewhere else? Some even assert that Jesus preached to "spirits in prison" while His physical body was in the grave for three days and three nights.

If this were the case, then we have no Savior, and the penalty of *your* sins is still in effect! You are still under the death penalty—without hope of eternal life, "for the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Only the death—not life somewhere else!—of a perfect, sinless human being could pay this debt. Only God in the flesh could save mankind. Since He created all human beings, Jesus' life was worth more than all of our lives combined.

You will not find anywhere in Scripture that Jesus was alive and active while in the grave, or that He re-entered His physical body when He was resurrected. Those who conclude this err in their reading of God's Word.

Rather, the Father—who was still in heaven ruling the universe—raised Jesus from the dead. It was not possible for a dead Jesus to raise Himself. Life cannot come from dead matter; it can only come from other life. The Father had life inherent within Him, and thus was able to resurrect Jesus to eternal life. In turn, Jesus is now able to impart eternal life to mankind: "For as the Father raises up the dead, and quickens them; even so the Son quickens [Greek: "to make alive, give life"] whom He will…For as the Father has life in Himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:21, 26).

Sin Equals *Debt*!

Some might wonder, *Couldn't God have just forgiven man's sin? Was the death of the all-powerful Creator of all things really necessary? After all, Jesus had much to say about forgiveness.*

For example, in the book of Luke, Jesus told the story of a creditor who had two debtors: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both" (7:41-42).

Could God not forgive sin in like manner?

Also consider the parable of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15, who wasted his entire inheritance on riotous living. In time, he realized what a foolish mistake he had made and decided to return to his father. The result? "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (vs. 20). His father immediately forgave him and even held a feast in his honor (vs. 23)!

Why could God not forgive us as did the father of the prodigal son?

Many believe that forgiveness of any sort is free. Since one cannot earn forgiveness, then it must be free, is the thinking. Yet this is not

the case. While it is certainly true that it cannot be earned, forgiveness is *not* free, in the strictest sense.

Consider the phrase "Free as the air we breathe." This is not entirely true. Although it is an involuntary action, it takes some amount of work to inhale the air that surrounds us. Even items that are advertised as "free" come at a price. Although you may not pay for it, someone, somewhere, in some way, did!

Forgiveness is the same. Though it is given to us as a free gift, it cost a tremendous price: the death of a God Being! Millions focus on the "free" aspect of forgiveness and miss the purpose of Jesus' death.

When one sins, he breaks the Law of God (I John 3:4), which all of us have done, as the apostle Paul stated in the book of Romans: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (3:23). To sin is to come short of attaining God's perfect character.

Because of sin, everyone owes God a debt—a price for that sin—which we saw earlier is the death penalty. The only way for us to personally satisfy it is to die—for all eternity! There is no other way for human beings to pay this penalty.

Thankfully, however, Jesus paid in full the debt for us. We need not suffer eternal death. Jesus met the ransom price for all human beings: "All come short of the glory of God, but they are justified for nothing by His grace through the *ransom* provided in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24, Moffatt translation). His death freed mankind from its captor—Satan the devil, who, through sin, previously held power over death.

Yes, forgiveness is "free" in that we can do nothing to earn it—but it is not free in that Jesus needed to die to pay *our* debt. It is free to us, but not free to God.

Universe of Laws

The vast universe is governed by fixed physical laws, which have definite results, and if ignored exact a penalty. God designed it this way. Think of the law of gravity. If you break this law by jumping from a five-story building, the penalty will be broken bones, and likely death. What about the sun's rays? If you are outside on a scorching hot summer day without covering, will you not get sunburned? On the flip side, if you stand outside in temperatures of 50 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, will you not receive frostbite and eventually die? What about the orbit of the Earth around the sun and orbit of the moon around the Earth? If these were not fixed, life would not exist here.

God's spiritual laws are no different. They are fixed, and govern human beings spiritually. To produce peace, happiness and order, these laws must be kept. True happiness cannot be achieved any other way, no matter what our human nature may believe. Those who break God's laws are "broken" spiritually.

God is love (I John 4:8, 16), and His law reveals how to love Him and our fellow human beings—how to show outgoing concern for others and treat them as you would wish to be treated. "Jesus said unto him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matt. 22:37-40).

In other words, God's Law reveals how to love God and other human beings. Many ideas exist about what love is, but the Bible states that keeping the Law of God *is* love. "For this is the love of God, that *we keep His commandments*: and His commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3).

When a person breaks God's laws, he will eventually arrive at the final destination: death! It is automatic, like breaking the law of gravity. God does not intervene and sentence us to death. Death—the penalty of sin—is automatic!

Consider. If you board a plane from Britain to the United States, you will eventually arrive in the U.S. If you travel down the road of unhappiness, misery and despair, you will ultimately arrive at your final destination—death.

Someone Must Pay

Because of His perfect character and supreme wisdom, God has determined that all debt must be reconciled, one way or another. For us to be offered eternal life, someone had to "balance the books." Someone had to pay the penalty. A Savior of mankind was needed!

Let's remember the story of the creditor who forgave those who were indebted to him. Did someone pay for this debt? Yes! The creditor paid the price. To the debtors it was "free," but it cost the creditor whatever amount of money they owed.

What about the parable of the prodigal son, who was forgiven by his father for throwing away his inheritance? Who paid the price? The father did. There was no longer an inheritance to sustain the son. That money was gone—wasted. Now the father had to provide for his son with other means.

It is the same with sin. It always exacts a price—and whoever forgives must pay that price. God the Father and Jesus were willing to pay our "sin debt" in full. They were willing to cancel our debt. God's perfect character simply would not allow sin to just be "shrugged off." He would not compromise His Law! Jesus needed to die in order for the Father's mercy—and eternal life—to be available to us. Sin is too serious not to be punished. Jesus willingly took the sins of the world upon Himself and became our Savior. There was no other way.

Forgiveness for a Purpose

Do you comprehend what an incredible price was paid for you to be released from the penalty of your sins? The Word—He who was in the beginning with God, and very God Himself—divested Himself of all His glory and became flesh for the purpose of *dying for your sins!* Jesus suffered, was tempted, persecuted, despised, rejected by His creation (John 1:11) and crucified for *you*.

Jesus spent three days and three nights in the grave. A Being who had never tasted death—who had been alive for all eternity—who had never been separated from the Father—was dead for 72 hours! This occurred so you and I would be freed from the penalty of eternal death. (You are about to learn proof of this exact timeframe.)

The Father allowed His Son to be put to death for a grand purpose, for He "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not *perish*, but have *everlasting life*" (John 3:16). It took the death of Jesus for the death penalty to be lifted—so human beings would not perish for their sins, but would have the opportunity of receiving eternal life.

Therefore, true Christians belong to Him! They have been bought with a price.

(Interestingly, John 3:16 is perhaps the most oft-quoted verse in the world of traditional Christianity, yet few recognize that Jesus' death saved us from eternal death and opened the door to eternal life. In other words, human beings *do not* possess an immortal soul that goes to either "heaven" or "hell" upon death. As we saw earlier, the "dead know not anything." This will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Eighteen.)

Jesus is the only way to salvation. As He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Christians are to allow Him to live His life in them, to help them overcome the pulls of the flesh—temptation to sin and break God's perfect law of liberty (Jms. 1:25; 2:12).

What does God expect of true Christians? "[Become] you therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). God is perfect, and expects His people to aspire to the same standard. Though perfection cannot be achieved in this life, Christians are to strive for it each and every day, through Jesus living His sinless life in them.

Think of God's mercy as an investment in future growth. Through the death of Jesus, human beings may now receive God's grace—unmerited pardon. Through Jesus' resurrection and His life (Rom. 5:10), Christians may overcome sin and build God's holy, righteous character, which is VITAL for entering the kingdom of God.

Unlike what most think, God's mercy does not allow one to continue in sin (Rom. 6:1-2). After all, He commands His followers to be perfect. One cannot be perfect and break God's laws! Christians are commanded to grow and overcome sin (Rev. 2:26)—not continue in it! Obeying God and overcoming sin produces righteous character.

Jesus Christ and the Father paid a tremendous price. Without their sacrifice, *no one* would have any hope of entering the kingdom of God. Mankind would have no Savior. All would be traveling with a one-way ticket to eternal death.

Three Days and Three Nights

Throughout the book, we have alluded to Jesus being in the grave for three full days and three full nights, in contrast to the common Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition. Now we will thoroughly examine the timing of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. By the end of this chapter, you will have no doubt that the commonly held views of how long Jesus was in the grave are simply not biblically accurate.

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees challenged Jesus to prove with a sign that He was the prophesied Messiah. His answer? "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a *sign*; and there shall no *sign* be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be *three days* and *three nights* in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39-40).

Here it is most plain that Jesus would be in the grave for *three* days and *three* nights—in other words, three complete 24-hour days.

How, then, does the "Good Friday-Easter Sunday" tradition fit? Can 72 hours (three days and three nights) fit into a period between late day Friday and early Sunday morning? Why do so few even seem to question this *only sign that Christ said He would give that He was the Messiah?* Could He have been wrong on this single great proof of who He was and still have been the Messiah?

Since no one directly witnessed His Resurrection, we must examine the only available authority on this great event—the Bible! The apostle Paul said to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5:21).

While most willingly accept the common traditions of *men*, true disciples (learners, students) of Jesus want to know what HE says.

The Tremendous Importance of His Sign

Consider what is at stake in Jesus' statement in Matthew 12:39-40. If He failed His only sign, then He is not our Savior and *nothing* He said can be trusted. In effect, if His prophecy of this sign *failed*, then He must be considered a false prophet. He would be a fraud and should not be followed—and mankind has no savior!

Do not confuse the resurrection itself with the question of "how long" Jesus would be in the grave before His resurrection took place. *The length of time* He was to be in the grave was the test of His sign not the actual resurrection.

While it is embarrassing to watch so-called "Bible experts" try to explain away Christ's only sign, they really have no choice. If Christ's sign remains intact, the Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition would be exposed as groundless—false—and collapse in a heap!

Some Bible commentaries leave one nearly breathless in astonishment when they assert that three days and three nights, in the Greek language, can mean *three periods of time*—either day or night. Friday night, Saturday daylight and Saturday night are portrayed as these three "periods" of time.

At least some are honest enough to acknowledge that the Friday-Sunday tradition is, in fact, only about *half* the length of time that Jesus said He would be in the grave.

What Are Days and Nights?

Can we know for certain or must we speculate on the meaning—the definition—of a *day* or the meaning of a *night*? Does the Bible leave this definition open to opinion—with one man's opinion as good as another?

Jonah 1:17 plainly says, "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish *three days and three nights*." Most scholars acknowledge that this Hebrew phrase must mean a 72-hour period. Without getting into specifics, there is no room for any "approximations of time" theories in the Hebrew.

Jesus said His time in the grave would be "as Jonah." The word "as" means there is a comparison. In other words, just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three entire days, Jesus was to be in the grave for three entire days. This comparison does not allow one to

"negotiate" the meaning of the Greek, as some like to do, since the Hebrew phrase can only mean three full days.

Did Jesus understand the length of a "day" or the length of a "night"?

He did! In John 11:9, He asked, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"

In several places, the Bible mentions that Jesus rose "the third day." How long was this? The first half of the creation chapter, Genesis 1:4-13, plainly states that God "divided the light from darkness. And God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night. And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the first day…And the evening [darkness] and the morning [light] were the second day… And the evening [now three periods of darkness called night—three nights] and the morning [now three periods of light called day—three days] were the third day."

This is the Bible's definition of the length of time accounted for within the phrases "the third day" and "three days and three nights." It spanned three periods of darkness and three periods of light. Six times 12 hours equals 72 hours!

How clear!

The Source of the Problem

We have now established the exact duration of Christ's time in the tomb as a 72-hour period. He was there for three days and three nights "as Jonah was." We will shortly examine four additional scriptures that prove the same thing.

In Mark 7:13, Jesus warns against "making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." How is it that intelligent, well-educated Bible scholars seem to "know" that Jesus was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday? What is it about Jesus' clear, straightforward sign that they cannot accept? The answer lies in the comfort of long-held—but clearly false—*traditions*!

One of the most important rules of Bible study is to gather *all* of the scriptures on a subject to gain the complete picture. There are other scriptures that prove the 72-hour duration of Christ's time in the tomb.

John 2:19-21 states, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and *in* three days I will raise it up…But He spoke of the temple of His body." Clearly, the use of the phrase "*in* three days" means that Christ's time in the tomb *could not exceed* 72 hours—or it would not be *within* the three-day period.

Conversely, Matthew 27:63 establishes Jesus' time in the tomb as not *less than* three days, or 72 hours, for it says, "*After* three days I will rise again."

Examining two additional verses in Mark's gospel account prove the same parameters of John 2 and Matthew 27. Notice Mark 8:31: "And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and *after* three days rise again."

A late Friday afternoon entombment means a late *Monday afternoon* resurrection. It is as simple as counting one, two, three! If this verse stood alone without other scriptures to qualify it, it must be admitted that Christ's use of the word "after" does not, by itself, *limit* His time in the tomb to 72 hours. He could still be there longer. He just could not be there one bit *less than* 72 hours. This much should now be clear.

We are now ready for Mark 9:31: "They shall kill Him; and *after* that He is killed, He shall rise *the third day*." This verse presents another *limitation* on Christ's time in the tomb. Consider! This verse, if taken by itself, places His time in the grave between 48 and 72 hours. The phrase "the third day" *caps* the duration at 72 hours—but it also creates a minimum of 48 hours—or the period would be somewhere in *the second day*! Again, if this verse is to be taken alone, a Friday afternoon crucifixion requires a resurrection sometime *after* late Sunday afternoon and no later than late Monday afternoon.

Accepted by Professing Christianity

The Good Friday-Easter Sunday tradition distorts the truth of what actually happened. Since the originators of this false doctrine had no sound biblical proof or authority, they resorted to fraudulent tactics to legitimize their fabrications. One such claim was that Hermes, the brother of Pope Pius (about the year AD 147) "had received instruction from an angel, who commanded that all men should keep the Pasch [Passover] on the Lord's day [Sunday]" (*Antiquities of the Christian Church*, Joseph Bingham, p. 1149).

In time, Sunday came to represent the Passover as the time of Christ's crucifixion and burial, *and* the resurrection. However, since it was not logical to condense the events of three days and three nights into only one day, the idea of a Friday crucifixion was born. The above-mentioned letter from Hermes was used to validate the position of Anicetus, Pius's successor, who disputed with Polycarp over the issue of transferring Passover to a Sunday. Trained by the apostle

John, Polycarp held fast and taught the observance of Passover as Christ and the apostles had always done. Yet, the bishops of Rome had other ideas.

Thus, the letter from Hermes was either a forgery or it was deceptively written by Pius, who died just before Polycarp's visit to Rome (*Apostolical Fathers*, James Donaldson, p. 324). The bishops at Rome had decreed that they possessed the power to supersede and change the times and laws of God (see Daniel 7:25). They rewrote history and changed the order of events to introduce their false doctrines.

Their effort to change the day of the resurrection to Sunday was simply a continuation of a Babylonian tradition—that Nimrod (father of the Babylonian Mystery Religion) was resurrected on a Sunday. By AD 321, Roman Emperor Constantine established Sunday as part of the official state religion, thus legitimizing all the various traditions attached to that day.

What Really Happened from Burial to Resurrection

As we saw in Chapter Eight, Jesus' crucifixion occurred on Passover day, the 14th of Abib (or Nisan), the first month in God's Sacred Calendar. This occurred in the year AD 31, in which Passover fell on a Wednesday. Many fail to consider the prophecy that the Messiah would be "cut off…in the *midst* of the week" (Dan. 9:26-27). Wednesday falls in the middle of the week—the very day upon which Passover fell in AD 31. According to the Roman calendar, this date was Wednesday, April 25.

Between the ninth and twelfth hours (3:00-6:00 p.m.), Christ died (Luke 23:44-46). With Governor Pilate's permission, Joseph of Arimathaea procured the body, wrapped it in linen (John 19:40) and placed it in the sepulcher (Luke 23:50-53). By the time the burial was complete, the Sabbath "drew on" (vs. 54). Thus, the burial took place on Passover *day*, shortly before sunset.

Passover is a *preparation day*; it precedes an annual Sabbath. This annual Sabbath (called the First Day of Unleavened Bread) was called a high Sabbath or "high day" (John 19:31) and fell on a Thursday that year. It was on this day that the high priest and the Pharisees came to Pilate to ensure that Christ's tomb was securely guarded and sealed (Matt. 27:62-66).

Mark 16:1 records what occurred on that Friday: "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him." (Verse 2 jumps to Sunday morning.) The phrase, "and

when the Sabbath was past," refers to the high day that occurred on Thursday. Since the women could not buy spices on the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), Friday was the only time they could have done so.

Luke 23:56 states, "And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." After buying the spices, they returned and prepared them to be applied to Christ's body in the tomb, which they planned to do after resting on the weekly Sabbath (Saturday).

Luke 24:1 states, "Now upon the first day of the week [Sunday], very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them." The women found the tomb empty (vs. 3). Two angels in shining garments informed them that Christ was *already* "risen" (vs. 4-6). Mark 16:2 states that the women were present "at the rising of the sun." This means Jesus was resurrected *before* sunrise. John 20:1 further tells us that Mary Magdalene came early "when it was yet dark" and found the stone that sealed the tomb was already rolled away. No sunrise resurrection could have occurred—because Jesus was *already* resurrected!

Nowhere does Scripture record that Jesus rose at sunrise on Sunday morning. However, it does tell us that Christ would be in His grave for three days and three nights. Anyone willing to believe the Bible should not find this difficult to accept. In fact, it is the only logical conclusion that can be drawn. Christ was placed in the tomb just before sunset on Wednesday. Three complete days (three days and three nights) bring us to the end of the weekly Sabbath, just prior to sunset, when Christ was resurrected—just as He had prophesied!

Proofs to Confirm the Year AD 31

The Sacred Calendar reveals that Passover occurred on a Wednesday in AD 31. By first establishing the day of the week and day of the month of Passover in 1931, we can arrive at the day of the week and day of the month of the Passover in AD 31. Precisely 100 19-year time cycles would have elapsed. Following this method helps greatly in computing the difference of elapsed time between the Roman and Sacred calendars during that 1,900-year time span. After this, we can safely calculate the month and week in which Passover fell in AD 31.

Various Hebrew calendar software programs calculate when Passover or any other Holy Day fell in almost any year, even before AD 31.

The following historical accounts will further validate the evidence presented here.

The Decree of Artaxerxes

In the seventh year of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, a decree was made to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 7). It followed the decree of Cyrus, in which he acknowledged that "the Lord God of heaven" had charged him "to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2). Artaxerxes' decree became significant because of a prophecy revealed to Daniel.

Daniel 9:25 states, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be *seven weeks*, and *threescore and two weeks*: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times." This shows that there are 62 weeks + 7 weeks—69 prophetic weeks (or 483 days). Applying the day-for-a-year principle (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6), we arrive at 483 *years* from the decree until the beginning of Christ's ministry.

The decree was made during the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign (457 BC). This date is historically well documented. By subtracting 457 from 483, we come to the year AD 26. When counting from BC to AD, astronomers correctly add one year since there is no year "zero," while historians and chronologists generally neglect to do this. Adding one year brings us to AD 27—the prophesied year of the beginning of the ministry of the Messiah.

Luke 3:23 tells us, "And Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age…" The context of this verse is after John the Baptist had begun his ministry and just before Jesus began His. Since Jesus was 30 years old in AD 27, He would have been born in 4 BC. Remember, we must add one year to compensate for no year "zero." Thus, from 4 BC, advancing 30 years brings us to AD 27. This leads us to the next historical proof that further confirms when Jesus was born.

The Time of Herod's Death

Shortly after Christ's birth, an angel warned Joseph in a dream that he and his wife Mary were to take the child and flee into Egypt. They stayed there until the death of Herod (Matt. 2:15). Christ was an infant less than one year of age when Herod died.

Matthew 2:16 shows that Herod "slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men."

Herod knew the child's approximate age, but went beyond that age to include those up to age two, to make sure that the prophesied Messiah would not escape execution.

To better establish the exact time of Herod's death, we find in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* a reference to a lunar eclipse. A footnote in the Whiston translation of Josephus states, "This eclipse of the moon (which is the only eclipse mentioned by Josephus) is of greatest consequence for the determination of the time for the death of Herod…and for the birth and entire chronology of Jesus Christ. It happened March 13th, in the year of the Julian period 4710, and the 4th year before the Christian era" (Bk. XVII, ch. vi, sec. 4). According to Josephus, Herod died the following year, 3 BC.

Soon after Herod's death, the angel instructed Joseph to return to the land of Israel with Mary and Jesus, who would have been about one year old.

Time of Construction of the Temple

As mentioned, Jesus was 30 years old (Luke 3:23) when He began His ministry in AD 27. Now, we will see how the chronology of the temple harmonizes with the chronology of Jesus: "Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign show You unto us, seeing that You do these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, *Forty and six years* was this temple in building, and will You rear it up in three days? But He spoke of the temple of His body" (John 2:18-21).

This occurred on the first Passover during Christ's ministry, in AD 28. The Jews said that the temple had been under construction for 46 years. By adding one year to compensate for no year "zero," this means that the temple's construction began in 19 BC, the 18th year of Herod's reign.

In *Antiquities*, Josephus wrote, "And now Herod, in the eighteenth year of his reign… undertook a very great work, that is to build of himself the temple of God…" (Bk. XV, ch. xi, sec. 1). From 19 BC, we advance 46 years since the beginning of the reconstruction of the temple, arriving at AD 28—the first Passover after the beginning of Christ's ministry.

The Reign of Emperor Tiberius

Other historical evidence involves the time of the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry. Luke 3:1 begins by explaining, "Now in the

fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea…" It then describes the beginning of John's ministry.

The reign of Roman Emperor Tiberius began in about AD 11 or 12, since he reigned concurrently with Augustus Caesar for about 2 years. If we add the 15 years of Tiberius' reign to AD 11 or 12, we arrive at AD 26 or 27. Here again we see the biblical chronology verified by history. The 15th year of Tiberius brings us precisely to the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry, which was just before the time of Christ's ministry.

The Governorship of Pontius Pilate

Historians agree that Pilate ruled for ten years. Luke 3:1 shows that during the 15th year of Tiberius' reign, Pilate was governor. *Some* historical accounts, such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, date Pilate's rule from AD 26 to 36. When he was recalled, he immediately sought help from his close political ally, Emperor Tiberius. Yet, while Pilate was en route to confer with him, Tiberius died, in AD 37. With Tiberius' death, Pilate's rule ended the same year. Therefore, Pilate's ten-year rule would have had to coincide with the years AD 27 to 37.

Now let's recap: Pilate's governorship over Judea began in early AD 27, during the 15th year of Tiberius' rule. Meanwhile, John the Baptist began his ministry in early AD 27, which preceded Christ's ministry by several months.

Christ's ministry would not have begun until the autumn of AD 27 since (1) He was 30 years old when His ministry began and (2) He was born in the *autumn* of 4 BC. Christ's ministry could not have begun later than AD 28 because, at that point, the temple's 46-year construction would have been finished. Thus, the autumn of AD 27 corresponds with numerous secular and historical proofs, as well as Scripture.

The Length of Christ's Ministry

Remember the prophecy in Daniel 9, which established 483 years, from 457 BC to AD 27. Verse 27 establishes the length of Jesus' prophesied ministry: "And He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate [margin: *desolator*]."

Christ was to confirm the covenant for one week. According to the day-for-a-year principle, the seven days of that week equal seven years. Yet, in the midst of the week, the Messiah was to cause the sacrifice and oblations to cease. This was done by offering His own life to cover the sins of humanity, as part of God's Plan of salvation. The Messiah was "cut off" (vs. 26) in the "midst of the week"—after 3½ "days," or prophetic *years*. His earthly ministry lasted precisely 3½ years. Then He was cut off—crucified—in the middle of the week—Wednesday. In this prophecy, the "midst of the week" had a *dual* meaning, as does most prophecy.

Since Christ's ministry began in the autumn of AD 27, this means that He was crucified in the spring of AD 31, or 3½ years later.

John 2:23 records the first Passover of His ministry in AD 28: "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did." Afterward, Christ began teaching in the area of Judea near Jerusalem.

Luke 6:1 records an event during the Passover season in the second year of His ministry, in AD 29: "And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first, that He went through the corn fields; and His disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands."

The term "the second Sabbath after the first" means the second high day, which was the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. Although this event is covered in Matthew 12:1-8 and Mark 2:23-28, only Luke's account, written in Greek, makes clear which Sabbath this was. The Greek term, *deuteroproton sabbaton*, literally means "the second Sabbath of the first rank"—or the second high day of that Passover season.

John 6:4-5 records the following, which preceded the third Passover (AD 30) of Christ's ministry: "And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He said unto Philip, Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" This is also recorded in Matthew 14:15, Mark 6:35-36, and Luke 9:12.

The fourth and final Passover of Jesus' ministry is the most documented Passover of all. All four of the gospels cover it in detail. Notice Luke 22:1-2: "Now the feast of unleavened bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Him; for they feared the people." John 11:55 records, "And the Jews' Passover was near at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves."

Christ's final Passover completed His earthly ministry of 3½ years. Again, it began in the autumn of AD 27 and ended in the spring of AD 31, on a Wednesday—in the "midst of the week." Traditional Christianity claims that Christ's crucifixion occurred on a Friday, in AD 33. However, it can easily be documented by God's Sacred Calendar that none of the four Passovers during Christ's ministry fell on a Friday. The four Passovers fell on Monday (AD 28), Saturday (AD 29), Wednesday (AD 30), and Wednesday (AD 31), respectively.

Christ's Sign Fulfilled

Who will you believe? Theologians, scholars, higher critics and other traditionalists, who reject the sign that Jesus gave? Or Jesus' own words that He would spend three full days and three full nights—72 hours!—in the grave?

It is now time to read a final account: the two angels' statement to the women at the tomb. This time notice Matthew 28:6. It states, "He is not here: for He is risen, *as He said*." This would be impossible if Christ had been in the grave one second more or one second less than 72 hours. The One who said, "Are there not twelve hours in a day?" was well aware of exactly how long His sign required that He remain in the "belly of the earth"—the grave.

Not only did Jesus state that He would fulfill His sign, but it was also established by the mouth of two witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15), who happened to be mighty angels of God.

Based on when Jesus was buried (sometime between three and six o'clock on the day of His crucifixion), His sign as our Messiah was that *He must* rise at the same time 72 hours later. Otherwise, He is an impostor and a fraud, and we have no Savior.

Unless you desire to make "the word of God of none effect through [man's] tradition" (Mark 7:13), you must now admit that an accepted, popular tradition has crashed in a heap of rubble.

Where Is Jesus?—and What Is He Doing?

What has Jesus Christ been doing for the past 2,000 years? Most believe He is trying to help the poor through charity organizations or missionary campaigns to "get people saved"—that He is "entering hearts" when listeners give their lives to Him—spreading the kingdom of God on Earth through evangelizing Christians—and working through all churches that profess Christianity.

There need not be any mystery of where Christ is and what He is doing. The Bible is clear, and you will soon have no doubt about His role.

The Right Hand of God

Let's begin by examining the gospel accounts of Christ's life and death. A key prophecy describing where He went after His resurrection is found in Luke 22: "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led Him into their council, saying, Are you the Christ? Tell us. And He said unto them, If I tell you, you will not believe: And if I also ask you, you will not answer Me, nor let Me go. *Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God*" (vs. 66-69).

Jesus' words are clear. Before His death, He prophesied He would ascend to heaven. But did this happen? Can we find more evidence in the gospels?

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He continued to teach His disciples and prepare them for the work they would carry out after He

was gone. The account in Mark records that after fulfilling His task, Christ ascended into heaven: "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, *He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God*" (16:19).

Upon making the ultimate sacrifice, Christ was raised by God to the highest possible position on Earth or in heaven. Notice: "When He [the Father] raised Him [Christ] from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, *far above* all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and has put *all things* under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22).

The Bible reveals that Jesus "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

This picture is very different from that which you may be accustomed. After fulfilling His purpose on Earth, Jesus Christ was glorified and exalted to sit at the Father's right hand. While there are many more references to Christ's position at God's right hand, it should be clear that Christ is alive and well. With all the talk of Jesus in mainstream churches, rarely does anyone speak of what Christ is doing today at the right hand of God. Why do so few seem to care about something so crucial to their existence—and to their salvation?

Now that it has been established *where* He is, *what* does Christ actually *do*?

A Living, Active High Priest

If Jesus has been in heaven during the past 2,000 years—through the fall of Rome, the bloody crusades, the Renaissance, World War I and II, and the advent of the Information Age—we might ask: How has He spent His time?

The key to this question lies in one of the most important offices Christ holds. Among His many roles and titles, such as Prince of Peace, Savior, Apostle, King of kings, Lord of lords, Jesus Christ is also referred to as a High Priest.

Take note of this clear statement not only about Christ's location, but also regarding one of His offices: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:14-15).

Let's examine more proof of Christ's all-important office. In Hebrews 3:1-2, Paul writes, "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of

our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to Him that appointed Him.” The Bible makes clear that God the Father has appointed Jesus Christ to the office of spiritual High Priest. This is the office through which Christ works.

But what does Jesus *do* as High Priest?

Making Intercession

In Hebrews 8, Paul elaborates on Christ’s responsibilities as High Priest. “We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices” (vs. 1-3). Jesus Christ is described as a “Minister” in God’s sanctuary. He is actively working in God’s Temple—the definition of it comes later—acting as a mediator between Christians and the Father. His sacrifice gives Christians access to God.

In Ephesians 2, Paul records, “But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are *made near* by the blood of Christ…for through Him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (vs. 13, 18). To break this wall of separation, Christ’s death was required. Through prayer, Christians are now permitted to enter the throne room of God (Heb. 4:16). It is only through Jesus, as the active High Priest over His New Testament Church, that this is possible. It is among His responsibilities to present spiritual sacrifices, prayers, to God the Father.

The apostle Paul wrote that “Wherefore He [Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Christ *lives* to intercede on a Christian’s behalf. The word *intercede* means to “intervene between parties with a view to reconciling differences.” In I Timothy 2:5, Christ is also called the “Mediator between God and men.” When fully understood, it is plain that Jesus takes a crucial and active role in working with true Christians and the Father.

Death or Life?

In a book of many necessary insets, here is one more that is most vital to understand. It involves one of the very greatest deceptions—in fact, outright lies!—attributed to the role of Jesus Christ. Be sure to comprehend what is now explained. Too much depends on it for you to miss this knowledge.

A near universally accepted idea is that Christians are "saved by Christ's *death*." Hundreds of thousands of preachers speak in these terms every week to the millions who hear them. So do evangelists and missionaries crisscrossing the world. Thousands of cheap tracts are also printed and distributed saying the same.

Here is just one quote from such a pamphlet, recently found on my front door. Sadly, these are usually badly written, so the wording, spelling and grammar quoted is as it appears under the subhead "The Blood Saves": "Forgiveness, Justification and Redemption there're all wrapped up in one word, Salvation. If you want your sins forgiven, to be justified before God, and have your soul redeemed from Hell, there's only one way, be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. 'Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him (Rom. 5:9).'"

First, the passage cited states that Christians are "*justified* by the blood of Jesus"—not *saved* by it. The author simply cannot read. He should have included the verse immediately following verse 9, which was conveniently left out. Notice: "For if, when we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God by the death of His Son, much more, being *reconciled*, we shall be SAVED *by His* LIFE" (vs. 10).

The thinking in this tract is repeated with such conviction, time and time again, from pulpits and in similar literature, that most assume "it must be in the Bible." But it is *not* in the Bible. In fact, you saw that the Bible says exactly the opposite—and right after the verse most often quoted to prove that Christians are "saved by the *death* of Christ."

Christians certainly are justified—or reconciled—to God by Christ's blood, which brought His death. (Of course, this was very thoroughly explained in Chapter Eleven.) When verses 9 and 10 in Romans 5 are read together, as they appear in the Bible, this is the plain meaning.

Before explaining the phrase "we shall be saved by His life," the matter of justification/reconciliation needs to be clarified. What exactly again is it that Christ's blood does? This was explained earlier in Romans, for the person who would have been reading what Paul established in context before arriving at chapter 5. Notice: "Whom [Jesus Christ] God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of *sins that are past*, through the forbearance of God" (3:25).

The blood of Jesus Christ covers "sins…past." Of course, that same blood will also cover future sins that one commits—if such transgressions are always followed by repentance. Jesus Christ, as

High Priest, mediates such sins on the repentant sinner's behalf before the Father. But Romans 3:25 and 5:9-10 make plain that the DEATH of Christ reconciles people to God by removing the Romans 6:23 death penalty ("the wages of sin") hanging over them.

But Romans 5:10 reveals that the justified/reconciled person is "saved [not justified or reconciled] by His [Christ's] *life*."

How could this be missed if one were reading even somewhat carefully? Then you must ask yourself, *How could such vast numbers of ministers all be missing this?*

But let's understand what they are missing. Recall what Christ said on His final night with the disciples: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that *I go away*: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I *depart*, I will send [it] unto you" (John 16:7).

It took the *resurrection* of Christ—His return to LIFE!—that permits Him to "go away"—"depart"—to heaven so that He can send the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) into converted minds. Without it, they would be unable—completely helpless—to build God's character through continual growth and overcoming. But in a world where ministers are not teaching people that the very character of God is to be built in their lives for them to qualify to rule with Christ, such colossal "oversights" are to be expected.

While more could be said, there is not space here to explain this in greater detail. But any chapter describing where Christ is and what He is doing would have to include an explanation of this all-important work He is daily doing on behalf of Christians.

Do not fall for the deceptive reasoning of ministers who simply do not know their Bibles! It is no wonder they unwittingly bring so many doctrines of a different Jesus. (This will be addressed more thoroughly in the last two chapters.)

Guiding His Church

Another responsibility Christ has is to build, guide and protect the New Testament Church (Matt. 16:18). An earlier quoted verse from Ephesians reveals His role over the Church. Do not miss its message: "When He raised Him [Jesus] from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places…and has put *all things* under His feet, *and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church*, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (1:20, 22-23).

Just as Jesus worked through His physical body during His earthly ministry, He now works through His *spiritual* Body—the Church (I Cor.

12:27). Christ is building His Church to fulfill God's plan for humanity. The apostle Peter describes this process: "You also, as lively stones, *are built up a spiritual house*, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5). (This subject is one of the biggest overlooked and misunderstood in the Bible. You are about to learn much more about it in the next chapter.)

However, human beings cannot join the Church on their own volition—God must call them into Christ's Body. Notice: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him" (John 6:44; also see verse 65).

Christ places His ministers in the Body to teach, strengthen, counsel and edify its members (I Cor. 12:18-28). (More is also coming about this in a later chapter.)

Preparing and Refining a People

Jesus has also been preparing Christians for positions in the kingdom of God. At His Return, He will establish the government of God on Earth and give positions of rulership to His followers. God's servants are being trained now to serve under Christ as kings and priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Recall from I Peter 2:5 that the Church is called "a holy priesthood."

Jesus Christ is training this advance team of leaders to rule under Him in God's kingdom—a world-ruling supergovernment. But God will only trust leaders who have been properly trained and proven for such a task.

This leads to another aspect of what Christ has been doing for the past two millennia. Recall the phrase "perfecting of the saints" from Ephesians 4:12. From the start of the first-century Church, Jesus has also been helping the Father in the refining process of all Christians. Hebrews 10 states, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all…after He had offered *one sacrifice for sins forever*, sat down on the right hand of God…For by one offering He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (vs. 10-12, 14).

The Greek word for "perfected" means "to complete, accomplish, consummate (in character), consecrate, finish, fulfill or to make perfect." Coupling this with Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:48, the process of becoming like God—developing holy righteous character—to rule in His kingdom becomes clear.

The greatest work God is doing right now is perfecting His character in true Christians. Christ is described in Hebrews as the "Author

and Finisher" of a Christian's faith (12:2). Jesus Christ is, in a sense, helping to *finish* Christians. Again, His continued LIFE makes this possible. Jesus' other great work in this age is, through the vehicle of His Church, to get His precious truth to as many as possible before the arrival of the worst time of world trouble in history.

"Confirming the Word"

By now you should have a much more comprehensive view on what Jesus Christ is doing. Although He is now in heaven, He will not remain there for much longer (I Thes. 4:16-17).

Before concluding, it is important to examine one final passage in Mark 16. "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word [what they preached] with signs following" (vs. 19-20).

Verse 20 reveals that Jesus Christ worked with the first-century disciples *from heaven*. In Matthew 16:18, He promised His Church that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

This means Jesus is actively working with His Church today…

"I Will Build My Church"

In one of the most powerful, dramatic and profoundly important statements in the Bible, Jesus Christ declared, "I will build *My Church*" (Matt. 16:18). No matter how one interprets it, this passage speaks of a single church!—one organization! Christ continued, "and the gates of hell [the grave] shall not prevail against it." He promised that *His* Church could never be destroyed.

Over 2,000 different professing Christian church organizations have been "built" by men in the United States. Another is started every three days. Estimates place the number of professing Christians at above two billion. While church *attendance* seems to be increasing, it is not increasing as fast as the confusion surrounding the question of which is the *right* church.

While it has been said, "They can't all be *wrong*," it is more correct to say, "They cannot all be *right*." If Christ built His Church as He said, then it can be found somewhere on Earth today—and it is the only *right* Church. But we must ask: How do we find it—what do we look for—how do we identify it—how do we know it if we see it?

Traditions of Men

Jesus said, "But *in vain* they do *worship Me*, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments *of men*" (Matt. 15:9). In Mark's parallel account of this statement, He continued, "Full well you r*eject the commandment of God*, that you may keep your own tradition" (7:9).

The world's Christianity is filled with traditions. One of the largest is the traditional view of the New Testament Church. Most ministers, theologians and religionists typically define the church in this way: "All those who sincerely believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior constitute the true church." This is often followed with the familiar statement, "There are many routes to heaven" or "There are many spokes on the wheel of salvation." Though the Bible does not teach that heaven is the reward of the saved, the clear implication of these is that people can believe what they want, or be a part of any group or organization they choose, and still be Christians—still receive whatever is salvation. While people may sincerely believe these traditional ideas, *they are sincerely wrong!*

Your Bible declares, "God is not the author of *confusion*, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints [the context shows this refers to all *congregations* of the true Church, not all *organizations* of men]" (I Cor. 14:33).

God's Church (composed of *many* congregations of saints) is to reflect *peace*—not confusion. You need not be confused about the identity of the true Church. God commands, "*Prove* all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5:21). While this certainly refers to *scriptural* matters (not the car you drive or house you buy), it does say "ALL things," not "*some* things," should be proven! Surely God would not exclude something of such magnitude—such vital importance—as the matter of where His Church is found. And He would never emphatically tell people to prove things that *cannot be proven!*

A Persecuted Little Flock

When speaking to His disciples about the importance of seeking the kingdom of God, Jesus said, "Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). By no stretch can churches comprised of millions, let alone over two billion, be considered a "little flock."

Christ understood that *His* Church—His *little* flock—would be persecuted and despised by the world. Just before His crucifixion, He warned, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have *persecuted Me*, they will also *persecute you*" (John 15:20). In the previous verse in the context, Jesus had reminded His disciples that "I have chosen you *out of the world*, therefore the world *hates* you." Christ *was* persecuted, to the point of horrible crucifixion after a night of brutal torture. Therefore, the true Church could also expect to be persecuted—and hated! Those in it are

not "of the world." The world senses this and hates them for it (Rom. 8:7). Christ used Paul to record, "Yes, and *all* that will live godly *in Christ Jesus* shall suffer *persecution*" (II Tim. 3:12). The word "all" means what it says!

Consider what we have just discussed. How many churches can you name that are small, persecuted, not of this world—and even hated because of it? Think about those with which you are familiar. Do any fit this description? Surely not many!

The Importance of the Name of the Church

The world's churches have many different names, which are derived in various ways. These include the particular *doctrines* they teach, the names of the *men* who founded them, the humanly devised type of *church government* that they espouse, their *location*, or their intended scope and size, such as *universal* or *catholic*—to be thought of as all-encompassing.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus prayed for His Church. Here is what He said: "Holy Father, keep through *Your own name* those whom You have given Me, that they may be *one*, as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them *in Your name*…I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Your truth: *Your word is truth*" (John 17:11-12, 14-17).

There are 12 separate places where the New Testament records that the true Church *has* been kept in the name of the Father—*God*. The first five refer to the entire Church, or Body of Christ, as a whole. The next four speak of a specific local congregation, while using the same term "Church of God." This may refer to the Church of God at Judea or Corinth, etc. The final three references speak collectively of all the individual local congregations combined. All these references use the term "Churches of God":

(1) Acts 20:28: This verse is instruction to the elders to "feed the CHURCH OF GOD."

(2) I Corinthians 10:32: "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the CHURCH OF GOD."

(3) I Corinthians 11:22: "…or despise you the CHURCH OF GOD, and shame them that have not?"

(4) I Corinthians 15:9: Paul wrote the same thing to two congregations: "For…I persecuted the CHURCH OF GOD."

(5) Galatians 1:13: "I persecuted the CHURCH OF GOD."

(6) I Corinthians 1:2: "the CHURCH OF GOD which is at Corinth."

(7) II Corinthians 1:1: "the CHURCH OF GOD which is at Corinth."

(8) I Timothy 3:5: Paul references any elder in a local congregation: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the CHURCH OF GOD?"

(9) I Timothy 3:15: "…behave yourself in the house of God, which is the CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD." This verse adds a descriptive word to God by using the term "living."

(10) I Corinthians 11:16: "…We have no such custom, neither the CHURCHES OF GOD."

(11) I Thessalonians 2:14: "For you…became followers of the CHURCHES OF GOD which in Judea are in Christ Jesus."

(12) II Thessalonians 1:4: "So that we ourselves glory in you in the CHURCHES OF GOD."

In the modern age, for corporate reasons, the Church uses an additional descriptive name to distinguish itself from other "Churches of God"—those merely *appropriating* God's name, but not obeying His commandments, believing His true doctrines or doing His Work. Herbert W. Armstrong, the twentieth-century leader of the Church, chose the name Worldwide Church of God and before that, Radio Church of God. Successor to the Church led by Mr. Armstrong, we have chosen the name *The Restored Church of God*.

Just as various mainstream denominations may have a few correct doctrines mixed with much error, some appropriate to themselves the name of God's Church. But only one Church on the face of the Earth has the correct name and teaches all the additional many true doctrines that the Bible teaches! Recall that Christ prayed, "Sanctify them through Your truth: Your word is truth." The Church that Jesus directs and guides is sanctified—set apart—by its belief of the *plain truth* of God's Word!

In addition to carrying the name "Church of God," we have seen that the true Church has come out of the world, is small and persecuted, even to the point of being hated by it. This Church is then also set apart by its beliefs and practices—which are in complete agreement with the truth of the Bible!

Unified Through God's Word

Men have their own differing definitions of what the Church actually *is*, but only the Bible definition—*God's* definition—matters. Read it for yourself. Paul wrote this to Timothy: "…that you may know how

you ought to behave yourself in the *house of God*, which is the *Church of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Tim. 3:15). In the end, no other definition, devised by men, is acceptable. This definition of the Church *Christ* built will guide us throughout the remainder of this chapter. God's Church has and teaches "the truth." While most never consider or hear about it, this verse has always existed.

We have discussed how this world's churches are in confusion, divided by endless disagreement over doctrine and practice. Amos 3:3 asks, "Can two *walk together*, except they be *agreed*?" The answer is NO!

This world's churches do not practice the principle of "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word of God*" (Luke 4:4), exactly as written. Instead, since they follow the many differing traditions of men, endless disagreements separate, divide and create more and more churches of *men*. They do not "walk together," generally because they do not "agree"—either with each other or God!

God's Church is different. Many New Testament verses show that the Church Christ built is *unified*—with all its members and congregations walking *together* in complete agreement with each other, and with God and Christ.

An important point, demonstrating the unity of the true Church, emerges from Christ's same prayer in John 17, on the night of His betrayal. He prayed, "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be *sanctified* [set apart] *through the truth*…That they *all* may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one *in Us*: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them; that they may be one, *even as We are* one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made *perfect in* one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them, as You have loved Me" (vs. 19, 21-23).

These are powerful statements! Christ intended that His Church be unified—"one"—*no less than were He and His Father*! There is no room for disagreement in a Church that is *this* unified. These verses describe a perfect oneness through right (true) teachings—the *same* kind of oneness that the Father and Christ enjoy. It is *this* kind of unity that allows true Christians to be "in" them—be *in* Christ and the Father (vs. 21).

Even in the Old Testament, David was inspired to record, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for *brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psa. 133:1).

We now must examine several New Testament passages to see if, in fact, this kind of wonderful unity was apparent *after* the New

Testament Church actually formed. Did God's true servants teach and administer *this* kind of agreement? And how is that unity achieved?

First, notice this early picture of God's Church. On the day of Pentecost, gathered in "one accord" (Acts 2:1), when the New Testament Church came into existence, 3,000 converts were baptized. They formed the very beginning of Christ's building of His Church. The initial description given was "…and they *continued steadfastly* in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (vs. 42), "…*all* that believed were *together*" (vs. 44) and "…they, continuing daily with *one accord*…did eat their meat [food] with gladness and *singleness of heart*" (vs. 46). From these verses, we clearly see that the Church Christ built was unified—in agreement—over doctrine, and together. Notice verse 47: "And *the Lord added* to the Church daily such as should be saved."

In the Church Jesus guides and directs, He is the One who adds to it—He builds it!

Only One Organization

The New Testament speaks of the Church of God as the same thing as the "Body of Christ." This introduces remarkable understanding.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul recorded that the Church had many separate members (individual brethren), and this was likened to various parts of the human body, in that these members were connected. A careful study of chapter 12 brings this truly extraordinary understanding. Verses 12 to 14 state, "For as the body is one, and has *many members*, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one *Spirit* are we all baptized into one body…For the body is not one member, but many."

When one is converted—has repented, been baptized and received the Holy Spirit—this verse reveals that he has actually been placed into the Body of Christ as well as into the Church of God.

Many have been confused by what this means. In other words, exactly what is the Church or Body of Christ into which one has been baptized? When Jesus Christ walked the Earth, His preaching of the gospel and other teachings, and all the miracles and works that He did, were done through and from His physical body. Of course, after crucifixion and burial, Christ's body was later resurrected as Spirit, before ascending to heaven, requiring that His work and preaching be transferred to another entity, His Church—which Scripture makes plain that Jesus Christ still considers to be His "Body" continuing on Earth what He started.

The context of I Corinthians 12 then uses the analogy of hands, feet, eyes, ears and the mouth to show how different parts of a *human* body (Christ's body was once human) are *connected* within the *same* person. Paul continues, "But now has God set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they *many members*, yet but one body" (vs. 18-20).

The Popular Belief

The "Christian" world teaches that the Body of Christ—Jesus' Church—consists of many denominations, fellowships or communities of believers, said to all be connected by the Holy Spirit working in believers wherever they are affiliated. (Many, many sources attest to this popular thinking.) But this is totally contrary to what the Bible teaches about the Body of Christ. This substitute idea—a very clever counterfeit!—asserts, in effect, that Christ and His Body are divided among many groups or organizations. We will see that this is not true.

I Corinthians 12 cannot be "spiritualized away" by human reasoning. It does not describe an amorphous, disconnected, "spiritual" body of disagreeing people and organizations throughout professing Christianity. Any foot, eye or ear that is taken from a human body *dies*! No severed body part can live for very long without blood supply and the connective tissue necessary to secure it to the body. God created the human body, so He obviously understands the analogy that He inspired.

Further Meaning of "Body"

For additional proof of the meaning of *body*, consider two additional scriptures, written to two separate congregations under Paul's leadership.

Notice his statement to the Colossian congregation: "And He [Christ] is the head of the body, *the Church*" (1:18). Now see again the first of Paul's instruction to the Ephesian congregation. Speaking of what God placed under Christ's control, Paul wrote, "…and gave Him [Christ] to be the Head over all things to *the Church*, which is His body" (1:22-23). The Bible definition of the *Body of Christ* is *the Church*! They are the same.

Further, in chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul went on to admonish the brethren there to be "Endeavoring to keep the *unity* of the Spirit in

the bond of peace. There is ONE BODY [Church], and one *Spirit*, even as you are called in one *hope* of your calling; one *Lord*, one *faith*, one *baptism*, one *God and Father*" (vs. 3-6). Again, there must be no confusing the all-encompassing unity and agreement that this verse requires of God's people. Recall how Christ prayed for *this* kind of oneness and unity.

A few verses later, Paul described the importance of a faithful and true ministry, actively working with and teaching Christ's Church. Carefully read and comprehend the following lengthy, important passage:

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the *perfecting of the saints*, for the work of the ministry, for the *edifying of the* body of Christ: till we all come in the *unity* of the *faith*, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, unto a *perfect man*, unto the measure of the stature of the *fulness of Christ*: that we henceforth be *no more children*, *tossed to and fro*, and carried about with *every wind of doctrine*, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth *in love*, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly *joined together* and *compacted* by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of *every part*, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (vs. 11-16).

Type of Christ's Human Body

The Church is a type of Christ's own physical Body when He was on Earth and, as its Head, He governs, directs and builds it, adding to it daily (Acts 2:47). The above verses describe that Body as being unified in both *doctrinal truth* and *love*. In phrase after phrase, this passage demonstrates that the entire Church ("*whole* body" and "*every* part") must be walking together in *complete* doctrinal agreement under Christ's authority. And He works through His *true* ministers to keep the Church from drifting into "every wind of doctrine."

The New Testament Temple of God

We cannot leave the subject of the Body of Christ until another vitally important connection to all that the Church is becomes clear. The New Testament Church of God, which we have seen to be the same as the biblical Body of Christ, is also described as the "temple of the

Lord." There are a number of New Testament passages that make this plain, and they are crucial to understand. Recognize that in the Old Testament the magnificent physical temple (first built by Solomon, and later rebuilt by Zerubbabel, with a still later renovation by Herod) was the place where God dwelled. Everyone understood this. The Old Testament Temple, as we will see with the New, was also often referred to as the "House of the Lord."

The term "temple" is used in a host of contexts throughout the New Testament. This word appears literally scores of times through the gospels and epistles of Paul, as well as in various places in the book of Revelation, usually there referring to the Temple of God around God's throne in the third heaven.

The English word "temple" generally derives from three separate Greek words that can correctly be translated as "temple." These are *oikos* (oy' kos): "a dwelling, by implication a family home, household or temple"—*hieron* (hee-er-on'): "a sacred place, that is, the entire precincts of the temple (at Jerusalem or elsewhere)"—and *naos* (nah-os'): "a feign shrined temple—the central sanctuary itself."

Let's examine passages that remove all doubt about what—more correctly, *who*—is the Temple of God today.

John 2:19-21 is the place to start, and it was quoted earlier in a different setting. It offers important proof that the Body of Christ is the same as the Temple of God. As you read, realize that Christ's words are the Bible interpreting the Bible, and they provide the best introduction to the subject of the New Testament Temple. Note especially the final part of the passage: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building [the renovated second temple built after Solomon's had been destroyed], and will you rear it up in three days? But He spoke of the *temple* of *His body*."

If you have come to understand that Christ's "body" is also His "temple"—and that the "temple" is "His body"—obviously the same as the term "Body of Christ"—you cannot get confused. All you must do is take Jesus' words at face value. The Bible will continue to be seen to interpret itself. As you read, recognize that you are receiving astonishing understanding known to but the tiniest few alive on Earth today!

What Paul Recorded

Paul recorded much more than any other biblical writer about the New Testament Temple. Let's start with his foundational statement

in Ephesians 2:19-21: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building *fitly framed together* grows unto an holy temple in the Lord."

He also wrote this to the Corinthians: "For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (I Cor. 3:9).

Note this. Unlike the custom of today's English, the King James translators carefully used "ye" whenever the intent was plural and "you" when it was singular. The *ye* here means all of the Ephesians and all of the Corinthians, or thus the whole Church, collectively. It will become clearer as we proceed that individual members are not the Temple of God, but rather the entire Church as a whole comprises the Temple.

We will later come to understand *how* the Bible describes—the specific term that it uses for—individuals *within* that Temple. It cannot be overstressed that this is supremely important understanding for all who seek to serve God in the manner and in the place that He requires.

A few verses later in I Corinthians 3 Paul added this: "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in ye? If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are" (vs. 16-17).

Placed together, these verses reveal that God sees His people—the true Church—as both His Building and His Temple. Understand that God is *building* a Temple—or a House. Almost identical, I Corinthians 6:19 does add a little more, making clear how serious it is if those called of God treat lightly the incredible privilege it is to have God dwelling in them—if God's people do not conduct themselves in a manner that reflects this.

But the second epistle to the Corinthians adds significantly more understanding. Let's notice: "And what agreement has the Temple of God with idols? for ye [notice the plural pronoun is used throughout] are the Temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (6:16).

The last part of this passage is a quote from Leviticus 26:12. Its use here demonstrates God has *always* planned—"has said" from the beginning—that His Church, those in whom He would in the future *personally dwell*, would be the greatest—truly the most glorious—temple of all. Realize that Leviticus was recorded long before either Solomon's or Zerubbabel's temple was built.

There is a powerful message for everyone in the preceding verses leading up to verse 16 quoted above. For those who desire to be in God's Temple, there exists no room—none!—for doctrinal compromise with any of the false, pagan teachings of counterfeit Christianity—summarized as "unrighteousness" and "darkness" (vs. 14). Christians are to "touch not the unclean thing" (vs. 17)—anything that is sin.

Pause to read 14 and 15. Then take the time to read each phrase in Ephesians 5:6-11, followed by verses 23 and 30. The first group of verses condemns all compromise with every form of unrighteousness. The latter two verses tie Christ as Head of "the Church" to those in it being what He considers the individual "members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones."

Let this understanding of exactly what it means to be in the Body of Christ sober you!

Church, Body and Temple—Three Critical Verses

One final proof (there are several others) that the *Church of God*, the biblical *Body of Christ*, the *Temple* or *House of God* are the exact same thing is understood by carefully comparing three additional passages in Paul's epistles. Follow very closely the incredible connection between these important verses.

Do not miss what they reveal!

Let's begin by returning to I Timothy 3:15. This crucial but we saw largely ignored bedrock passage provides the New Testament definition of the true Church of God. Notice the Church is also there called "the *house of God*…the *Church* of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (Take more than a passing interest in the fact that this verse directly ties the Church to where "*the* truth" is—not "*some* of the truth" or "*much* of the truth" or even "*most* of the truth"—and certainly not "truth *mixed with error*"—but rather simply "THE TRUTH"!)

Then, get clear in your mind that the Church is called "the house of God." (It is also more than interesting that this is virtually the same term used from the beginning regarding Solomon's Temple—which was generally referred to as the "House of the Lord," or "God's House," as in I Kings 6:37-38.)

We saw that Jesus taught in Matthew that a "house divided…shall not stand" (12:25). Why also do those who teach the New Testament Church is scattered among many organizations never reference this verse? Christ went on to explain that even the devil realizes *his* "kingdom" cannot survive divided.

Surely Jesus is at least as wise as the devil!

Also recall that in Ephesians 2:19-21 Paul called the Temple of the Lord a "building *fitly framed together*." Here is the point not to be missed. Later, in chapter 4 of Ephesians, he said almost the identical thing about the Body of Christ. Notice: "From whom the whole body *fitly joined together* and compacted [I Corinthians 12:24 adds "tempered…together"] by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part…" (vs. 16).

The phrases translated "fitly *framed* together" and "fitly *joined* together" derive from the exact same Greek word *sunarmologeo*. It means "to render close-jointed together, i.e. organized compactly, be fitly framed (joined) together (in the sense of laying)." Paul obviously had the same thing in mind whether he was discussing the Church, the Temple (or House of God) or the Body of Christ.

Sunarmologeo offers truly fascinating meaning. The beginning and last portions of the definition—"render close-jointed" and "together (in the sense of laying)"—carry the obvious meaning of laying individual bricks or stones that are mortared or put "close-jointed" beside each other ("together") as one would lay them in rows within a building. (Take a moment to re-read Acts 2:42-47, where the first 3,000 baptized into the New Testament Church were bound together in all that they did.)

Since we saw that the Temple is also called God's "building," there is no possible way to read these passages and conclude that the true Church of God could be anything other than *one undivided organization*—a single building! Do not let anyone tell you that God's Temple (and Christ's Body) is anything less than this! His Building cannot be "spiritualized away"—as do professing Christian ministers with every doctrine in God's Word—into a "temple" that is ill-defined, disconnected, amorphous—and meaningless.

Now let's look more closely at what are the "bricks" or "stones" used in building—exactly what or who it is that lies together "close-jointed." At this point the knowledge presented in this chapter becomes personal.

An Astonishing Passage in I Peter!

The apostle Peter put an exclamation point—a capstone if you will—on all that Paul wrote about the New Testament Temple.

This first of his general epistles declares this to what would include all true Christians through the ages: "If so be ye [plural again] have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To Whom coming, as unto a living

stone [referring to Christ], disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as *lively* [living] *stones*, are built up a spiritual house, *an holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices [on God's altar], acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on Him shall not be confounded" (I Pet. 2:3-6).

It is obvious the *living stones* (Christ being the Chief Corner Stone) are the individual Christians in the Temple lying "close-jointed" or "fitly framed" *together*. And note that it was only the priests who could enter and serve in Solomon's Temple (II Chron. 23:6). Also, it is important to recognize that verse 5 should carry the stronger rendering of the positive command "*be ye* [BE YE!] also living stones," as is found in the margin of many Bibles.

This is absolutely incredible understanding, for those able to receive it. Get it firmly in mind before continuing. Everyone who wishes to receive God's Spirit should give much more than mere pause in determining whether they will fulfill this meaning—will *obey* what is a command!

Peter wrote more, and understanding cannot be complete without it: "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the Stone which the builders disallowed [or "rejected"], the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, *a royal priesthood*, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (vs. 7-9).

The world has never been willing to accept the *true* Jesus Christ! Neither will they accept the Church He built—and is still building. They "stumble" at His doctrines, and reject—"disallow"—Him as the Head of the Church—*any* Church. In His place they have brought a cold, *dead Jesus* (called "another Jesus") on a cross, who brings *dead understanding* (empty pagan doctrines), and who builds *dead churches* out of *dead stones*!

The Tragedy

Most will not hold precious the true Jesus Christ of the Bible. Neither will they hold to His teachings (of course, most will not even study them). They will not yield to His government. Neither will they come to His Church, nor support the Work of that Church. And they will not

permit Him to head their lives—and build them into His House. Blind to their actions, they keep themselves outside the Temple that He is constructing. They have unwittingly chosen not to be placed next to the "living stones" with which He is building.

Get this. If God is calling you, you will be judged on this knowledge! The apostle Peter also said two chapters later: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God" (4:17).

The Church has long understood that the "House of God" is His Church. By now you know this is the same as saying "His Temple"—of which you may be called to be a "living stone," one "closely joined" with all the others in God's unified "Building."

Why will most people not accept that God's Church—the Body of Christ—His House or Temple—is obviously one, undivided organization ruled by Jesus Christ as Head under the government of God—and doing His Work?

What could be more important for you to understand than these points? What could be more important to you than allowing yourself to be placed by Christ into the Temple—into the "House of God"—recognizing that it is being judged?

What could be more important to you than capturing the basic, but all-important, knowledge, never understood by Christendom, that "Except *the Lord* build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psa. 127:1)? There is but one House God could have had in mind here, the one He planned long before the Psalms were recorded. Regarding the churches of men, how could their founders think they could build their own "houses" and that the all-powerful, living Jesus Christ would submit to their lead, and follow them, instead of the other way around?

And how could so many millions blindly help them build?

Why Many Groups?—Some History!

The next two sections form related insets, the first to help the reader understand why the supposed Christian world has so many differing churches.

The universal church, centered at Rome, and teaching the false doctrine of the trinity, has always taught that the Body of Christ was solely composed of those within that church. Even though the Roman church taught doctrines that were almost entirely the tradition of men, their understanding that Christ led one undivided, organized spiritual Body, identified in a single Church, was largely correct. Their error was connecting this key doctrine to themselves instead of to the true Church of God, led by the *true* Jesus Christ (II Cor. 11:4).

Let's understand this by tying together several critical elements that clarify the thinking of the Protestant Reformers. When they rebelled against Rome, they were obviously no longer part of that church, and thus had departed from what they previously believed to have been the sole Body of Christ. They knew that Paul taught, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" and "For the body is not one member, but many" (I Cor. 12:13-14).

The entire world of Christendom is able to read this passage, and others, about the Body of Christ. All of these had to be reconciled with the fact that they had now left the Roman church and its authority. But here was their problem: They had to devise a teaching compatible with converts and believers *supposedly* being truly baptized, but now into a divided, competing and multiplying picture of denominations that is the Protestant world. They had to reconcile the idea of "one Body of Christ" with the reality of eventually hundreds of Protestant denominations—and other groups—with more appearing all the time. They were forced to conclude Christ's Body is composed of *many* organizations, denominations, fellowships and "communities of believers."

But this is utterly false!

Built Upon Which Rock?—Peter the First Pope?

When the Protestant Reformers rejected Rome's authority, they were simultaneously rejecting the rule of popes over the church. Also as an inset, let's briefly return to Matthew 16:18—where Christ said, "I will build My Church"—this time examining His statement to Peter following it.

Let's first read: "And I say also unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

This verse is the single bedrock scripture to Catholic theology regarding the *supposed* authority of popes, who are said to derive their position directly from Christ's *supposed* empowerment of Peter, and thus his successors in an unbroken line ever since. Over a billion Catholics today, and generations before them, have been taught that the passage designates Peter as the first pope. The verse simply does not say this, and the reader needs to understand what it does say—what Christ meant by His statement.

Breaking down the important Greek words within this passage makes it easier to understand:

Peter comes from the Greek word *petros*, meaning *a piece of rock, but either bigger or smaller than a stone*. (Note that the Greek word

for stone is *lithos*, essentially meaning a medium-sized rock.) The Greek word for *Rock* is *petra*, which means *a mass of rock*, usually very large.

Let's carefully examine and understand. Verse 13 mentions that Christ was speaking at Caesarea Philippi. It is significant that He chose this site to speak of His Church! Here is why.

This city is in the far north of today's Israel, about 25 miles north of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. Located at the foot of Mt. Hermon, it is where one of the three main branches of the Jordan River originates. The area is very beautiful. I have been there.

A Key—Where Christ Was Speaking

Standing on the spot where Christ delivered these words, you would see the following: Immediately above where the river springs from the base of a cliff is a massive rock outcropping that dominates the topography. Its presence towers over the landscape. None who were present when Christ spoke these words could possibly have believed He was talking about building His Church on Peter, whom He compared to a *little* rock. The enormous physical size of the rock looming directly over Christ's head reinforced His message that He was building the Church on a *giant* Rock—HIMSELF! This is, no doubt, why He picked this setting to utter His words in Matthew 16:18 to His disciples, and to Peter.

In effect, Christ was saying that Peter was a *small* rock. On the other hand, Jesus Christ is the *large* rock, or foundation stone of the Church that He built. Christ is actually distinguishing between the two. Proof that the mass of rock is Christ can be found in I Corinthians 10:4, Ephesians 2:20 and Matthew 7:24.

Understand that Christ is the great Rock upon which the Church is built. This verse is absolutely not saying that *Peter* is either that massive rock or that the Church is built on *him*. I Corinthians 3:11 shows there can be only one foundation (Christ), not two. Obviously, this applies to Peter's role. Ephesians 4:11-12 explains that apostles (Peter, Paul, John, etc.) were in offices that Christ established to serve His Church. Collectively, with the prophets, they form *part* of the Church's foundation—alongside Christ (Eph. 2:20).

Think of Jesus as having complimented Peter. Then there is this: If He had established him as the first (and infallible) pope, how could Peter almost immediately have fallen into what Christ labeled a satanic attitude in the very next verses of Matthew 16 (vs. 21-23)? Take a moment to read them. Would such an attitude be possible for one who

was spiritually infallible? Also, there is this question: How could Peter have later denied Christ three times?

Here are ten proofs that Peter was probably never even in Rome—and therefore could not have been the first pope:

(1) Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16; Gal. 2:7) not Peter. Rome was a Gentile city.

(2) The Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome in AD 50 (also see #9 below).

(3) Peter went to Babylon—in Mesopotamia (I Pet. 5:13).

(4) Paul would never have written what he did in Romans 1 (the book was written in AD 55), verses 11 and 15—clear insults to Peter if he had been faithfully serving there for 13 previous years (from AD 42), particularly if it had been as pope. Actually, *a* "Peter," Simon Magus (see the account in Acts 8), *was* there. It was *this* Simon (not Simon Peter) who was the *Pater* (or Peter), which means "a father." (*Paternity* and *patriarch* come from this word.) Simon Magus was already by this time the leading figure in the early apostate church at Rome.

(5) Romans 15:20: The apostle Paul declared that he would not preach (or write) upon any *other man's* foundation. Yet, Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. Thus, Peter could not have laid the foundation of the Roman congregation.

(6) Romans 16 contains 30 different salutations, yet Peter, again, supposedly the resident "pope" there, was not greeted by Paul. Think of what a grievous slight this would have been had he been present. Paul's epistle did not even acknowledge Peter.

(7) Galatians 1:18-19 and 2:7 demonstrate that Peter was based *at Jerusalem*, from where he periodically traveled to places like Bithynia, Northern Galatia and Babylon, and other places where Israelites (also see #9) had migrated, from AD 38 to AD 49—the dates of these events described in Galatians.

(8) Notice Luke 22:24. Related to these points, if Peter was already designated to be the future pope, why did the disciples argue among themselves about which of them was the greatest?

(9) Galatians 2:7 reveals that Peter took the gospel to "the circumcision"—the Jews, and the other tribes of Israel, referenced in #7. (See Matthew 10:5-6.)

(10) II Timothy 4:10-11 mentions that Paul wrote *from Rome* and records that "*only Luke* is with me"—obviously this eliminates Peter.

Although not the subject of this chapter, Peter was, in fact, the leading apostle in the early New Testament Church, but he simply was not the first pope and certainly did not even live in Rome.

Unity Complete

A great deal can be learned by examining Paul's instructions to various other congregations he was overseeing. He continually stressed unity and oneness within the true Church of God.

The Corinthian congregation had many problems—including terrible division and disunity. Early in his letter to this congregation, Paul strongly admonished them to stop entertaining other doctrines and to quit playing favorites with ministers. Notice: "Now I beseech you, brethren…that you all speak the *same thing*, and that there be *no divisions* among you; but that you be *perfectly joined together* in the *same mind* and in the *same judgment*…Now this I say, that every one of you says, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ. *Is Christ divided?*" (I Cor. 1:10, 12-13).

Do not miss the intent of this passage. Paul was inspired to describe, in *five* distinct and different ways, how completely all of God's people in every age should be unified and in agreement. These verses also cannot be "spiritualized away" by deceptive human reasoning.

Where in this passage does Jesus give license for multiple organizations—"churches"—to appear in His name? Where in this description is there room for hundreds, even thousands, of divided, competing groups, in disagreement over teachings—and diminished in the all-important impact in taking the gospel announcement of the kingdom of God (Matt. 24:14) and Christ's other teachings to the world (28:19-20)? The answer: Nowhere!

Let's examine further. Verse 13 begins with the rhetorical question: "Is Christ divided?" The only reason it is not followed with the word "no" or something similar is because the answer is so obvious. Considering what he had just written, Paul knew that the thrust of his question was equivalent to asking, "Is grass green?" or "Is the sky blue?" When people ask rhetorical questions, no one actually responds, because the answer is so obvious. Related to the point here, in Amos 3:3, even the question "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" is left unanswered for the same reason.

It was in this same letter to the Corinthians that Paul had to write, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (14:33), followed by "Let all things be done decently and in order" (vs. 40). Real "decency" and "order" are impossible if God's Church is divided into many organizations, let alone hundreds or thousands.

Now consider Paul's admonition to the Philippian congregation: "…stand fast in one *spirit*, with one *mind* striving *together* for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries" (1:27-28). And, "Fulfill you my joy, that you be *likeminded*, having the *same love*, being of one *accord*, of one *mind*" (2:2).

These passages teach that complete unity in the Church is the only condition acceptable to God! But there are others.

Paul admonished the Colossians to be "knit *together* in love, and…the *full assurance of understanding*," and "rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, *as you have been taught*" (2:2, 7). There is no misunderstanding the total unity Paul is describing. Brethren walk "together," assured of the right "understanding" that they "have been taught." (We already saw how strongly Paul admonished the Ephesian congregation, in numerous ways, to strive for unity.)

The local Roman congregation was experiencing a problem with false doctrines entering the Church. Notice how Paul instructed them to address this: "Now I beseech you, brethren, *mark* [take note of] them which cause divisions and offenses *contrary to the doctrine* which *you have learned*; and avoid them. For they…by good words and fair speeches *deceive* the hearts of the simple" (16:17-18).

Protecting Unity

The last passage contains very strong language. It introduces the truth of the biblical doctrine of disfellowshipping (sometimes described as *shunning* or *excommunicating*) those who depart from the truth into false doctrines and seek to take others with them, and to divide the Church. This principle demonstrates how important it is to God that His people not stray from the truth into manmade doctrines.

A number of additional scriptures address and amplify this same Bible principle. See Titus 3:10-11, I Corinthians 5:1-8 and I Timothy 6:1-5. Together, these passages represent a vital Bible doctrine that the true Church must practice in order to maintain unity. In addition to ignoring God's instruction, churches that will not practice this doctrine are full of division, discord and disagreement—which inevitably leads to splits within the church or congregation.

Fulfilling the instruction to disfellowship is neither abusive nor an act of hate! It is actually a form of God's *love* being administered to people who have drifted into error—and it is designed to wake them up. At the same time, it protects the remaining brethren in the

Church. It certainly requires a greater level of faith—that most find too difficult—to obey God's instruction to protect the Church in this way. Persecution can result. However, obeying God yields the fruits of peace, joy and unity in the Church (I Cor. 14:33, 40; Prov. 22:10).

The apostle Peter also taught the all-important need for Church unity and oneness. He wrote, "But you are *a* chosen generation, *a* royal priesthood, *an* holy nation, *a* peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9). The four phrases in this verse are in the singular—meaning *one*, not several, of each term referenced. If a nation is actually split into several or many nations, no one would consider it to be a *single* nation—it would be multiple nations, not "a" nation. The same is true of God's Church.

There is but one!

Christ Left No Doubt

Jesus Christ Himself taught the following on the vital importance of unity in the Church. From earlier, it is worth our time to revisit this passage more in-depth:

"Every *kingdom* divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every *city* or *house divided* against itself *shall not stand* [survive]" (Matt. 12:25). Recall that Paul asked in I Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided?" This is *CHRIST'S* own answer. His instruction is even more fascinating when the reader considers that He is describing *Satan's* kingdom in this account! I repeat: Jesus taught that even *the devil* is smart enough to know that his kingdom cannot be divided and survive! And I repeat: Surely, the great God of heaven and Jesus Christ are at least as wise as Satan the devil. Of course, they are infinitely *wiser*! They both understand that their Church also cannot be divided and expect to survive ("stand").

Consider. Can a divided marriage continue indefinitely? Could even the most powerful company survive if its board of directors were divided? Could a winning professional football or soccer team remain in existence if the coach continually challenged and opposed the decisions, policies and judgment of the corporate leadership and management of the team? Could a school survive if every decision made by the principal was attacked and repudiated by senior teachers on the faculty, and groups of teachers regularly broke away from the school to form another one?

Certainly not!

Again, Jesus Christ plainly stated that Satan's kingdom is unified (Matt. 12:25-26). Why, then, do professing Christians accept

the idea that the most important organization on Earth—the Church of God—can be divided into hundreds and thousands of competing, disagreeing denominations? Why do they presume that God cannot "figure out" what even the devil understands?

We are left to ask: How long could God's people survive in a state that members of a family, a company, a sports team or a school could not begin to endure—and would not even be foolish enough to *think* they could?

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus gave vital instruction to His disciples. In John 15, He explained the well-known analogy picturing Himself as the "Vine" and individual Christians as "branches" (vs. 5). Here is what He instructed, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches…for without Me you can do nothing" (vs. 4-5).

The obvious purpose of this passage is to explain that individual Christians *must* be connected to Jesus Christ, meaning to His one, organized, unified Church, to grow—to produce fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Read and reread all that you have read so far until it becomes crystal clear in your mind—and until it is impossible to misunderstand what is at stake in which church you enter. Remember, the true Christ is not divided—meaning there is only one true Church of God, and one true Work of God! Until you find *that* Church—the one, unified Body of Christ and Temple of the Lord—you cannot have contact with the living Jesus Christ who heads it, and only it!

***Jesus* Built His Church**

The world is built on the foundation of Satan's way. As "god of this world," he has constructed his own governments, cultures, educational systems, and other institutions—and he has also built his own "churches" (II Cor. 11:13-15). All of these together form a "building," with a vast superstructure, but one that is founded upon "sand," instead of the "rock" (I Cor. 10:4) that is the true Jesus Christ! Christ is not trying to build or to rebuild—repair!—the governments, institutions or churches of Satan's world. Soon these will all be swept away by the "rain," "wind" and "floods" that He described in Matthew 7:24-27.

But, as we have seen, Jesus also calls *His* Church "a building"—one that is "fitly framed together" (Eph. 2:21), and built with Himself as the foundation. He is literally "building a building" consisting of brethren whom He calls "lively [living] stones" (I Pet. 2:5). Christ is continuing His building of the Church today, and you are seeing it.

The true Church is depicted as a type of Jerusalem and as the Mother of all the brethren in the Church (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22-23). Like any Mother, she cares for and feeds her children.

Will you be one who strives to make *yourself* ready?

Finally, we have not yet addressed the actual meaning of the Greek word translated "Church" in the New Testament. This needs clarification. Most have supposed it means a building or an organization. It means neither. The word "church" is *ekklesia*, meaning "a calling out," especially as a religious congregation. Christians are indeed called *out* of this world—its ways—its customs—its practices—its traditions—its false knowledge and false doctrines—and *into* the true Church, and fellowship with God and the true Jesus Christ (I John 1:3).

God thunders this to all His people: "Wherefore come out from among them [the world], and be you separate…and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18).

May God help you to come out of the Babylon of this world (Rev. 18:4), that you may qualify to rule with Christ in the wonderful, utopian new world that lies ahead!

Church Government—with Power and Authority

Now that you have learned there is only one unified, organized Church that Jesus leads, a related, towering subject must be addressed: How is peace, unity and organization maintained in the Church? What is the entity that allows these qualities to thrive and for everything to be done "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40)?

GOVERNMENT is the key!

In fact, it is central to *everything* in life. Government is the glue that keeps the world together. Families cannot properly function without it. Neither can nations, armies, institutions, companies, churches, schools, teams, organizations or clubs—nor virtually any entity of more than one person. Where there is no government, there is no order—only chaos, confusion and everyone doing "that which [is] right in his own eyes" (Jdgs. 17:6). Institutions without a governing body do not—cannot—last for long.

God preserves His entire creation through government and law—and both the Earth and the universe reflect this.

Government, in the right form, brings structure, order, organization, stability, peace, protection and a host of other benefits to groups of every kind!

The Bible, above all else, is a book about government. Though space does not permit detailed examination, briefly consider just these biblical accounts—all of which relate to government: Lucifer's rebellion against God's government, Adam's similar decision when he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, how God governed

ancient Israel (Moses, Joshua, the judges, kings and prophets, etc.), Korah's rebellion, Saul's rebellion, how Christ qualified to replace Satan, why the governments of this world do not and have never worked, and the coming of God's world-ruling supergovernment, administered by Christ and the saints, to replace men's governments and bring peace, happiness, abundance and prosperity to all nations. All of these examples—and more—make this subject central to the Bible!

Furthermore, the gospel of the kingdom of God is a message entirely about government under the ruling Family of God. And this subject is the absolute BEDROCK CENTERPIECE of the *entire* Bible. (The entirety of the next chapter is devoted to making this clear.)

If government is central to everything in life, it should not be a surprise to learn that Jesus designed and established a specific form of government to lead His Church.

Government in the Church

Two of the great hallmarks of the true Church are that Jesus Christ built it and *He* is its Head. As its Founder, He is at the top of the governmental structure. This is not the case in other churches. Since Jesus built only one Church, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that *men* have built *all* other churches in existence today. Jesus is not in control of the world's churches—people are!

Men have devised various means to govern *their* churches. Generally, the top leaders in the large mainstream churches are elected by lower-ranking ministers, and these ministers are hired and fired by deacons or members of the church they purport to lead.

How exactly does Jesus head—lead, guide, direct—*His* Church? How is *His* Church governed?

In the last chapter, we briefly saw that there are various ministerial offices in the Church, as indicated in Ephesians 4:11-13. Let's re-read: "And He [Jesus] gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Let's add another scripture that brings further understanding. Paul told the Corinthians that "God has set some in the church, *first* apostles, *secondarily* prophets, *thirdly* teachers [evangelists, pastors and elders]…" (I Cor. 12:28).

Combining these two passages, a number of points emerge. We see that there are specific ministerial positions (apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc.) in the Church, and the words "first," "secondarily" and "thirdly" indicate each office carries a different level of authority. Apostles are *first*, directly under Christ, followed by prophets, who are *second*, then evangelists, who are *third*, and so forth. Each successive rank is subordinate to those above it. The office of apostle carries the most authority of any human office in the Church. Authority flows from Christ, through the apostle, and then down the list of ministerial ranks.

These scriptures also reveal that Jesus Himself calls and appoints, after necessary training, some in His Church to the various ranks in His ministry. This is made plain by the word "gave." As Head of the Church, Jesus has the authority to do this. Just like the Father calls people into the Church, Christ calls members of His Church into the ministry. It is not up to the individual lay member to decide whether he should become a minister.

Lay members and ministers alike in Christ's Church recognize that God's government is from the top down, not the bottom up, as is found in all democratic governments of men, in which the people are ultimately in charge.

You may be familiar with the phrase "Government of the people, by the people and for the people." The true Church is different. While the government that runs it is *for* the people, it is not run *by* the people, nor is it *of* them—it is by and of Christ. For the Church to operate smoothly and efficiently, no other way would suffice.

Peace, unity, harmony and doctrinal purity cannot be maintained under a government that rules from the bottom up. Also, it cannot be maintained in an organization where Christ is not the Head! Just because a church may operate from the top down, and have some correct ranks of the ministry, does not mean it is God's government. Christ must be in charge for it to be such—and we have seen that He can lead only one group, else He is divided!

In Chapter Seven, you learned that God's form of government has always been from the top down. Someone is always in charge in a given situation, even when both Beings are God! The Father has always been supreme in command and Christ, formerly the Word, has always been number two.

To prevent separate, independent and competing factions, which would lead to confusion and division, driving many out of the Body of Christ, God has organized government in His Church. That government is the GOVERNMENT OF GOD, and it results in teamwork, not division! God knows that cooperation multiplies and competition *always* divides.

Recognize that the Church is the kingdom of God in embryo, meaning members are being formed—daily preparing for the kingdom—in the womb of the Church, *begotten*, but not yet *born*, into the kingdom. God's government is similar—it is now only present in the Church, not yet over all nations.

Overview of Offices in the Church

The following is a general overview of the functions of each office in the Church. Space does not permit a full description of the duties of each.

Apostles are charged with announcing Christ's gospel message to the world, and supervising the proclaiming of that message. This office also oversees the entire Church and within it all administrative functions.

Prophets are those who foretell future events before they happen. Their mission in the first century was to receive messages or prophecies directly from God, and to convey these messages to the apostles. They evidently played a key role in the formation of the New Testament. But no prophets are mentioned as having either administrative or preaching functions in the New Testament Church. Also, there is no evidence of the existence of any prophets in the Church since the New Testament was written. Certainly, none are in the Church today. However, a prophet "like unto" Moses (Deut. 18:15), called the end-time "Elijah" (Matt. 17:11), will arise to carry out a special commission at the end of the present age.

Evangelists are senior ministers who proclaim the gospel to the public and in some cases raise up local churches. Under an apostle, they sometimes supervise a number of congregations. Evangelists also can hold top executive duties under an apostle at Headquarters.

Instructive for all that it says about how Christ's ministers work in His Church, II Timothy 4:2-5 states this about the duties of an evangelist: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch you in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry."

Pastors generally serve locally over one or more congregations overseeing day-to-day operations. This responsibility is central to the overall unity, stability and spiritual growth of congregations, individu-

ally, and the whole Church, collectively. In fact, certain parables given by Christ, such as the "wheat and tares" and the "sheep, wolves and hirelings," basically center on laborers *in the field*—pastors!

The word "teachers," found in I Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, refers either to an evangelist, pastor or elder, but the apostle Paul also referred to himself as a teacher. The word in the Greek simply means "an instructor (general or specific), doctor, master, teacher." So a teacher is simply one who dispenses *spiritual* knowledge.

An elder is one who is under a pastor in a particular congregation. He assists in the overseeing of the local congregation.

Deacons (men) and deaconesses (women) are the only physical offices in the Church. Those who hold this office are physical or material helpers. For example, these are servants who wait on tables, set up halls for Sabbath services, perform other forms of assistance, among many other physical duties. Acts 6:1-6 details how this office came into existence, and the qualifications for it.

Submitting to God's Government

Through His Church, Christ is training people to fill positions in God's future world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT. Members understand that to be born into the kingdom of God and to rule with Christ, they must first obey God and follow His government *now* in the Church. God will not hand *ultimate* power and authority to those who have not built holy, righteous character under God's government *in the Church*.

Paul gave further instruction regarding Christ's government in His Church. Notice what he told the Hebrews: "*Obey* them that have the *rule over you*, and *submit* yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (13:17). In verse 24, he added, "Salute all those that have the *rule over you.*"

He said this to the Thessalonians: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are *over you* in the Lord, and admonish you" (I Thes. 5:12).

These are basic scriptures that members in the churches of men largely ignore. But in the Church of God Christ actively works through offices that He has placed in His Church for its good.

I emphasize: Even the all-powerful Christ submits to the authority of the Father—the supreme in command of the kingdom of God. Notice an example of submission while He was in the flesh: "And being found in fashion as a man, He [Jesus] humbled Himself, and became *obedient* unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

As a result, "God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (vs. 9-10).

Jesus had to first submit to power and authority—government—before He could qualify to rule. Would anyone think that Jesus' servants are exempt from what He Himself had to do? Of course not! True disciples of Jesus follow His example and come under *His* authority. They submit themselves to the government of God *now*—in His Church. The whole world will do so in the world to come!

Now that you have basic understanding of how the Church of God is governed, we must examine in detail the crucial elements of power and authority, and their role in how Christ governs His Church.

Men's Governments—Power *or* Authority, Not Both

Let's begin by looking at the world's struggle to find the balance between authority and power. There are few things more frustrating than a government having authority, yet lacking the power to carry out its policies. This applies either to its administration or to the citizenry that it serves.

Consider for a moment the American president with his policies regarding foreign nations, Social Security, abortion, tax cuts, same-sex marriage and judicial appointments. No matter what the administration tries to accomplish within these areas, there are various constitutional "checks and balances" in place that often spell "checkmate" to the president (also true of prime ministers) in a democracy. Of course, America has always proudly trumpeted to the world that it practices "controlled power," meaning with the consent of "the people" through their elected representatives, and with this the case on governmental policies and matters of almost every size.

Teachers in schools and ministers in nearly all churches are additional examples of authority without power. They can teach and preach, but generally lack the "teeth" to tell their students and parishioners what they *need* to hear, rather than what they *want* to hear, let alone actually *enforce* school policies and church teachings without enduring miles of red tape due to the cumbersome mechanisms of bureaucracy. But they are still unfairly held accountable—kept under the gun—to "educate" students or "feed" their churches.

Ask any president or chief executive officer of a corporation who faces important decisions for which he must give account if he can do his job without the power to carry out those decisions. He will tell you,

"No!" Ask the coach of a football team the same question, and you will hear the same answer. Husbands in marriages, as well as parents with children—and leaders of almost any kind of organized endeavor—will say the same.

There can be the very frustrating circumstance of AUTHORITY without sufficient POWER to administrate it.

The Other Problem

However, there can be a worse problem, and it is probably the greatest problem with men's governments. There can be governments possessing complete unbridled POWER, but without proper, responsible authority and control. This is a description of dictatorships or totalitarian forms of government at the other end of the political spectrum from democracies.

Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany demonstrate what can happen when power is unrestrained. So do Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein—and so did Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan. Without control, nations can be destroyed. So can economies. And millions can die in the crossfire of world wars. Of course, this is the legacy left by most of the governments of men.

The problem of *unrestrained power* without *control* is easier to understand. There must be control, the properly channeled use of authority in the function of any governmental entity—or disaster can result.

God's Government—Power *and* Authority

What about Christ's Church? Does it have power without authority, authority without power, neither or both? Luke 4:36 states that the highly political Scribes and Pharisees "were all amazed" at Christ's ability to cast out demons, remarking, "What a word is this! For with *authority* and *power* He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." Here are both terms together, and those observing recognized both at work.

Five chapters later, in 9:1, Jesus transferred this capability to His disciples. Notice what they received: "Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them *power* and *authority* over all devils, and to cure diseases." Again, both terms together. Yet in the churches built by men, leaders derive their power from those under them—with those who can exercise "the power of the paycheck" upon them if they preach other than the usual diet of "love," "grace," and "forgiveness,"

etc., along with the other generally comforting subjects that they want to hear.

Ten days before Pentecost, as Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, He told the disciples, about to formally receive office as apostles, "But you shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Later, in Acts 4:33, it confirms, "And with great *power* gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord…" In fact, the apostle Paul wrote regarding *all* Spirit-led minds, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of *power*, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7).

Now notice what Christ had received from the Father, and would shortly give to His soon-to-be-apostles: "And Jesus said unto them, 'All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age'" (Matt. 28:16-20, RSV).

The end of Jesus' statement explaining that authority would come to the disciples—He had "all authority," and thus could give it—carries a promise that He would be with them *always*. Not only would His authority be with them, but there is clear evidence that very real POWER would accompany it. The Greek word translated "authority" in this passage is *exousia*, and it means BOTH power and authority. In fact, the King James version states, "All POWER is given unto Me…"

It is certainly consistent then that in more of the Matthew 28 conversation, found in Acts 1, Christ explained that "power" would be given to the apostles. He was simply reiterating the equation of POWER accompanying AUTHORITY, and vice versa, referenced in Luke 4:36 and 9:1.

Both of these most crucial elements in the apostles' ministry were to be given to them on the day of Pentecost. This was the Holy Day when the Holy Spirit was to be first given to large numbers of people. Of course, this meant that there would be an immediate need for responsible authority with power to be in place over the governance of the Church, as well as in the preaching of the gospel to every nation. The day of Pentecost symbolized this remarkable beginning, as Christ built His New Testament Church. He had to *simultaneously* give it the *two* most important *keys* to its survival through the ages—POWER and AUTHORITY!

Imagine the administrative challenge of managing 3,000 converts (plus children) arriving on the Church's first day in existence. Sound government would be necessary!

Jesus instituted, actually *re*-instituted from the Old Testament, a special ordinance that would symbolize forever the transmitting of authority and power from one person to another. In fact, it happened 3,000 times on the first day of the Church.

"Laying on of Hands"

All power within God's Church is governed under strict authority, and this is revealed through the doctrine of the "laying on of hands." Therefore, it is not a strange thing that this doctrine finds its place in Hebrews 6:1-2 among the six most basic doctrines of the Church.

The physical ordinance of the laying on of hands represents or symbolizes the *transferring of authority*, *with power*. At the same time, this ceremony shows that all who may be involved in it—for any reason—are coming *under authority*. In addition, this ordinance shows that God *works through human servants*, and that His people are to obey and humbly submit to Him through these human instruments. In fact, Pentecost, when truly understood, pictures God's perfect balance between power (the Holy Spirit) and authority (His government) through the laying on of hands.

It is no accident that this physical ceremony would have been witnessed so many times that day (with the other 3,000 converted). The point would have been ingrained to all observing.

In the Pentecost account, when the Holy Spirit entered all those present (the initial 120), it states, "Cloven tongues like as of fire…*sat* upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit…" (Acts 2:3-4). This was, in effect, God's own supernatural laying on of hands, probably on the heads of the recipients.

Ordination

Beginning in this section, we will examine how the laying on of hands is seen to be the way God transfers government or authority within His Church. In fact, we will see that this physical ceremony can involve the transferring of gifts, special status, blessings, and even curses.

One of the most important functions of the laying on of hands occurs with appointment—ordination—into Jesus' ministry. There are a number of New Testament passages where ordination occurred with

this ceremony involved. But the ceremony first appears in the Old Testament.

In Numbers 8:9-11, the Levites were ordained by the entire congregation of Israel through the laying on of hands. Later in Numbers, as Moses was nearing the end of his life, he laid hands on Joshua (27:18-20), with God instructing Moses to "put some of your honor upon him."

The first seven *deacons* in the New Testament era received this physical office of service through the laying on of hands (Acts 6:5-6). Paul and Barnabas were ordained to the highest human office of apostle by "prophets and teachers" under authority from the apostles in Jerusalem.

In I Timothy 5:22, Paul instructs Timothy to "lay hands suddenly on no man," but this is better rendered in the *Revised Standard Version*, "do not be hasty in the laying on of hands." With so much at stake when one is to be vested with power and authority upon ordination, it is easy to see why Paul would give such instruction. Where there is a *true* minister of God—an apostle or one under that apostle—there is *real* authority and *real* power.

Transferring Sins, Curses and Blessings

Immediately after the Levites were ordained in Numbers 8, the context continues explaining that these priests carried the authority to "lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks" for sin and burnt offerings (8:12-15; also Leviticus 4:13-15). In Leviticus 24, the young man who "blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed" was stoned to death, but only after all those who heard him "lay their hands upon his head" (vs. 10-15). The Azazel goat of Leviticus 16, representing Satan on the Day of Atonement, had the sins of Israel—a cursing—confessed over him during the laying on of hands by Aaron and high priests who followed.

But *blessings* were also accompanied by the laying on of hands. When Israel (Jacob) blessed Ephraim and Manasseh in Genesis 48, it records that he laid his hands on these young grandsons and passed both the birthright blessing and his name to them.

Mark 10 records, with similar accounts in Matthew and Luke, that the blessing of little children in the Church of God occurs with the laying on of hands.

Receiving the Holy Spirit

Acts 8:14-18 records the account of the apostles coming to lay hands on the Samaritans (who had been baptized by Philip) so that they could receive the Holy Spirit—and power! The apostle Paul received the

Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands in Acts 9:17, and Paul himself is shown in Acts 19:1-6 to have baptized and laid hands on those who had received John the Baptist's baptism, yet had not heard of the Holy Spirit. Every baptized member of the true Church understands that receiving the Holy Spirit follows the ceremony of the laying on of hands, which follows repentance and baptism.

Healing

The miracle of healing also involves the laying on of hands. Mark 16 records that Christ explained that His servants "shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (vs. 18). This statement is in accord with James 5:14, which describes how the elders of the Church are called to "anoint the sick" for healing. Finally, Acts 28:8 speaks of a man who "lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux, to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him."

Gifts and Special Miracles

The Bible also records—in both Old Testament and New—that certain special gifts came by the laying on of hands.

Joshua "was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him" (Deut. 34:9). I Corinthians 12:8-10 lists "wisdom" as one of the nine *gifts* of the Spirit (not the nine spiritual *fruits* of Galatians 5:22-23, which also includes faith as a fruit, something different than this).

Immediately after the ordination of Stephen to deacon, with the other six, God's Word states that he was "full of faith and power," which involved doing "great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:6, 8).

We see in this account that even a deacon was able to perform extraordinary miracles, but only because there was special power vested in the office of the apostles for God, through them, to confer it upon Stephen with the laying on of hands. But he also received the gift of faith. Also, Philip, ordained with Stephen to the same office, was granted special power under the authority of the apostles (8:6-7). Further, Paul stated that Timothy had received a gift, probably that of prophecy, "with the laying on of hands" (I Tim. 4:14).

Another fascinating account has to do with "*special* miracles" done "by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11-12). This is where it explains that "handkerchiefs or aprons" (anointed cloths), which Paul's hands had anointed, were sent to people so that "diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

Even marriages between believers involve the laying on of hands during the prayer at the end of the wedding ceremony. During this prayer, the minister asks God to not only bind the marriage, but to bless it and to grant the couple children, happiness, and so forth.

It is evident that the ceremony of laying on of hands carries special meaning within God's Church and government. This service always relates to the receiving of power and authority in some way. In every case, it was seen to confer something important from God through one human instrument to another.

At Christ's Return

When the kingdom of God arrives, the saints will begin their rule with Jesus Christ—the government of God will begin to be established over *all nations*. Truly, *this* government will have ALL power and ALL authority under it. The Feast of Trumpets pictures this event, with the other fall Feast days picturing other events from this point forward that occur through the rest of God's Plan over the next 1,100 years.

The governments of men will eventually be replaced by the governing Family of God, called the kingdom of God. But Paul describes this in a way that puts all that we have just examined in a very different light. And it has everything to do with *how* the government of God works—from the outset of the Kingdom forward and within the Church that Christ built 2,000 years ago!

Here is what was written to the Corinthians in the "resurrection chapter" about the first order of business with the arrival of the kingdom of God. Note well this extraordinary passage: "Then comes the end, when He [Jesus Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all *rule* and all *authority* and *power*" (I Cor. 15:24).

This is a fascinating verse. It reveals that Christ, with the newly resurrected saints, must dispel or "put down"—Daniel 2 states, "break in pieces"—all the ruling governments of men, wherein rests power and authority derived solely from human origin (backed by Satan).

We will focus on the words "rule," "authority" and "power." The word translated "rule" comes from the Greek word *arche*, from which comes ARCH. Of course, an arch is a bridge or structure above something. The word translated "authority" is *exousia*—and the word translated "power" is *dunamis*. This is the same word translated "power" in II Timothy 1:7, describing what Christians receive at

begettal of the Holy Spirit in their minds. In summary, it is certainly true that the overall rule of men, with their governments, does "arch" above every form of human authority and power held today.

All of men's governments, whether over nations (including the United Nations) or religions, the returning Jesus Christ and the glorified saints will eventually "put down," meaning to "abolish, cease, destroy, do away, make of no effect, bring to naught, vanish away and make void." From that time forward, there will be no more authority ever again in the universe other than God's government. Unlike competing supposed "churches of God," there will be only God's marvelous, wonderful government across the world.

With government, power and authority in mind, we are ready to examine how the government of God is tied to the gospel…

The Good News Jesus Announced

Immediately after overcoming Satan for 40 days in the wilderness, the first thing Jesus preached to the public had to do with the gospel. Notice this at the beginning of Mark's account: "Repent you, and believe the gospel" (1:15).

But exactly what is it that we—YOU—are to believe? Just what *is* the true gospel?

The majority would say something similar to the following: "The gospel is the good news of the forgiveness of sins through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Is this the gospel you believe? If so, then you do not believe Christ!

Here's why!

Many False Gospels

Almost everyone believes that the gospel is about the *Person* of Jesus Christ. Certainly, He plays an extremely important and central role to Christianity, but He is *not* the gospel. The Bible shows that Jesus is preached in conjunction *with* the gospel. Again, His role is enormous. But He is *not* the gospel.

Billions believe a manmade, fictional gospel *about* Jesus and His sacrifice.

Notice that Mark 1:14—"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God"—does not say, "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel

of forgiveness of sins through His sacrifice"! Again, while Jesus' death is immensely important—since without it no one would have the opportunity to receive eternal life—it is not the gospel.

Consider. If this were the gospel, then Jesus would have *had* to preach about Himself. But this would have contradicted His own words (John 7:18). Contrary to what false ministers might have you believe, you will not find Jesus referring to His sacrifice as the gospel anywhere in the New Testament.

Many proclaim a "gospel of salvation," others a "gospel of grace." Still others believe a "gospel of miracles" or a "social gospel." Yet others think of the "gospel of foods" or of "healing" or of "faith." And there are some who merely think of "gospel music" when they hear this word. These manmade ideas all ignore the truth of the Bible!

Notice Mark's account again: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." *This* is the gospel that Jesus preached. It was in *this* same context that He said, "Repent you, and *believe the gospel*." Which gospel? Of the "kingdom of God."

The first verse in Mark refers to this message, when it states, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." The gospel of Jesus Christ was about the KINGDOM OF GOD—not something else! One must believe *that* gospel—not a humanly devised counterfeit or substitute.

Strong Warning Not to Pervert It

This subject is so important that God inspired the apostle Paul to warn the Galatians then and us now:

"I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed" (1:6-9).

This is a very blunt statement—and a strong warning to all who will heed!

A little later, Paul stressed his hope that the "*truth* of the gospel might continue with you" (2:5). So there is one true gospel—with all others false!

Although some assert that Paul taught a different or additional gospel, it is plain that he never did. God used Paul to warn against ever allowing such false teaching by pronouncing a *curse* on any man, angel or even any apostle—"But though *we* [apostles]…preach any other gospel…let him be accursed" (1:8)—who violates this command.

What a powerful scripture—and WARNING!

Paul explained that the apostles were entrusted by God to preserve the true gospel. Notice I Thessalonians 2:4: "But as we [apostles] were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which tries our hearts."

This is a responsibility not to be taken lightly. *True* ministers must always teach what *God* commands—not what pleases *men* (including Bible "scholars"). Any claim that Paul taught a different or second gospel (usually thought to be *about Christ* or of "peace") is impossible. Had he done this, he would have been pronouncing a curse on himself! No thinking person can believe Paul would do this!

Jesus Was Prophesied to Bring the Gospel

In the Old Testament, Jesus was prophesied to come as a messenger. Notice Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I will send My messenger [John the Baptist], and he shall prepare the way before Me [Christ]: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in."

Jesus was the "messenger" of the gospel, not the message itself. And His message is actually the very core—the *centerpiece*!—of the entire Bible.

Meaning of "Gospel"

The word *gospel* is an old English word meaning "god spell" or *good news*. The word *kingdom* is also an old English term that means "government." Therefore, it is accurate to say that Jesus preached "the good news of the government of God." We will examine the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* of this good news, and how it relates to the Bible's greatest prophecy.

The kingdom of God is the dominant theme of not only the New Testament, but of the whole Bible. Yet, incredibly, most know little or nothing of it. Most ministers are oblivious to the true gospel, and

never preach about it. Therefore, virtually the entire world stands in complete ignorance of the single greatest truth in God's Word!

Yet another example that the true Jesus Christ is *unknown to Christianity*!

How Many Times Mentioned?

The word *gospel* is found over 100 times in the Bible. Sometimes it is found alone, and sometimes "of the kingdom" follows it. Other times, it includes "of the kingdom *of God*," or the equivalent phrase "of the kingdom *of heaven*."

Note that it says, "*of* heaven," not "*in* heaven." It is heaven's kingdom, and there is a big difference between the two. Just as kingdom *of* God means God's kingdom—not the kingdom *in* God—the same is true of the kingdom *of* heaven or *heaven's kingdom*.

Grasp this crucial point!

Throughout the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Jesus talked constantly about the kingdom of God. Here is but a tiny sampling:

"And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, *preaching and showing the glad tidings* [gospel] *of the kingdom of God*: and the twelve were with Him" (Luke 8:1).

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and *preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt. 4:23).

"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and *preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matt. 9:35).

"And He said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of *the kingdom of God*: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11).

"And He said unto them, I must *preach the kingdom of God* to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43).

"And the people, when they knew it, followed Him: and He received them, and spoke unto them of *the kingdom of God*, and healed them that had need of healing" (Luke 9:11).

A great many more scriptures could be cited showing that Christ's message was about the kingdom of God—*not* the forgiveness of sins, as most assume. Many of Jesus' parables were about God's kingdom.

Seven Proofs God's Kingdom Is Not on Earth Now!

Many professing Christians misread Luke 17:21 and Colossians 1:13 and conclude that the kingdom is here now, either in the form of the Church or "in the hearts of men." They then conclude that it is their "Christian duty" to spread it through brotherly love, tolerance, etc.

As sincere as this belief may be, it is not biblical. Then how did men jump to this false conclusion?

Here are two major reasons:

First, they don't let the Bible interpret the Bible. Instead of heeding II Peter 1:20, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation," they assign their own preconceived notions to Bible verses. Also, they do not allow the Bible to teach, reprove, correct or instruct them (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Second, they limit their understanding on a subject by reading only one or two passages, and taking them out of context. They also ignore many other verses that would give the "big picture" of what the Bible actually teaches. To understand the Bible on any doctrine, one must search *all* the scriptures on the subject. No single verse captures the entire meaning and understanding of any subject.

Isaiah 28:9-10 states, "Whom will He teach knowledge? And…make to understand the message?…For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (NKJV). In a sense, God designed the Bible to be like a jigsaw puzzle. Always piece together *all* related verses found throughout the Bible.

Now let's examine *seven* proofs God's kingdom is not on Earth now.

ONE: The Kingdom of God Is Within You?

In Luke 17:20-21 Christ said, "The kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

Many read this verse and conclude, "Aha! God's kingdom is within me." But is that what the verse *really* says?

To understand the meaning of this verse, it is important to recognize to whom Christ was speaking. The first part of verse 20 gives the answer: "And when He was demanded of the *Pharisees*, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said…" Christ was talking to the Pharisees—not His disciples! They asked Him, "When will your kingdom come?"

Here is Christ's answer: "The kingdom of God is within you." Could Jesus have meant that His kingdom was within the Pharisees—men He called "hypocrites" and "blind guides," who "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith," who were "full of extortion and excess," who were like "whited [tombs], which appeared beautiful outward, but…within [were] full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:21, 23-27)?

Emphatically, NO! More study shows that the phrase "within you" is a mistranslation. Some margins in the New King James Version read, "in your midst." The New English Bible reads, "is *among* you." The Revised Standard Version says, "in the *midst* of you." Christ was telling these carnal men that His kingdom was in their *presence*. How?

Jesus was referring to *Himself*. *He* represented God's kingdom. While Jesus was a flesh and blood man, He was also the Messiah. Born to become a king, He never sinned or went against His Father's will. He was, quite literally, the perfect representative of God's government.

TWO: Defining a Kingdom

All kingdoms consist of four parts: territory, a king (or ruler), subjects and laws.

If God's kingdom is already here, whether as the Church or in the "hearts of men," then the entire earth would be under its rule (Zech. 14:9).

If God's kingdom is already here, Christ, its King, would be sitting on David's throne (Isa. 9:6-7), ruling from Jerusalem (Zech. 8:3). Note: *Jerusalem* means "City of Peace." Yet today it is one of the most chaotic, terrorized, war-torn cities on Earth! Obviously, Christ is not ruling from *there*.

If God's kingdom is already here, His subjects (all mankind) would live under Christ's rule. Even Gentile nations such as Egypt will be required to obey Him—or suffer the consequences (Zech. 14:16-19). This is not the case today.

If God's kingdom is already here, His laws would be known by every man, woman and child throughout the earth. All people would at least be moving toward obedience. No one would be able to claim ignorance of these laws (Isa. 30:21; Jer. 31:34). This has not yet happened.

THREE: Seeing the Kingdom

In John 3:3, Christ told Nicodemus, a Pharisee, "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God." Confused, Nicodemus replied, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered…Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (vs. 4-5).

To see and enter God's kingdom, you must become spirit. Paul wrote, "Flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:50)!

Jesus further explained that spirit is like wind. It is invisible. One cannot see it. But human beings are flesh and blood, and can be seen.

Those who are "born again" shall resemble Christ (I John 3:2). No physical man looks like Him as He is in heaven today: "His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters…and His countenance was as the sun shines in [its] strength" (Rev. 1:13-17).

Do you know of anyone who looks and sounds like this *now*?

We should also consider that God's servants being "born again" will not happen until Christ returns (I Cor. 15:50-54; I Thes. 4:16-17). If this had already occurred, the whole world would know it. No one could possibly miss such an event (Matt. 24:23-27).

(We will address the subject of when one is "born again" in more detail in Chapter Eighteen.)

FOUR: World Peace Now?

Isaiah 9:6-7 says of Christ, "The government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end."

Watch the networks, read national news magazines and newspapers. Is this world enjoying peace? Do you believe Christ would allow murders, rapes, child molestation, riots, terrorism and wars under His divine rulership?

No! Obviously, Christ—the Prince of Peace—is not yet ruling His kingdom on Earth.

FIVE: What About Colossians 1:13?

To "prove" that God's kingdom is here, many cite this verse: "Who [the Father] has delivered us from the

power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son."

Let's carefully examine this verse and let the Bible interpret itself.

What is the "power of darkness" that God delivers His people from? Acts 26:17-18 states, "…delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send you, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God…" Satan and his demons rule the nations today. This is why Paul wrote that Christians do not "wrestle…against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12), and it is also why Christ said, "My kingdom [government] is not of this world: if [it] were…then would My servants fight…but now is My kingdom not from here" (John 18:36).

When God delivers His people from the "powers of darkness," He calls them out of this world (Rev. 18:4), out of its Satan-inspired (Eph. 2:2-3) system and ways of life—*its governments*. And He "has translated [margin: *transferred*] us into the kingdom [government] of His dear Son." God delivers His servants from the government, laws and ways of Satan to *His government* at conversion.

Christians are citizens of God's kingdom, though it is not here. For example, you are an American traveling abroad. Though you are not in the U.S., you are still an American citizen. Your citizenship is in America. In the same way, a Christian's citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), though he does not live there.

Now consider Romans 4:17 as it speaks of Abraham: "God, who quickens [gives life to] the dead, and calls those things which be not [do not exist] as though they were…" When God said to Abraham, "A father of many nations have I made you" (Gen. 17:5), Isaac would not even be born until a year later (compare 17:1-5 with 21:5). His offspring did not grow into a *single* nation until hundreds of years later in Egypt! God knew that their descendants would become prosperous nations

many centuries later. Since nothing can stop God from fulfilling His plans, to Him they are as good as done. Though His people are not *yet* born into His kingdom, He knows that they *will* be. Nothing can prevent this from occurring. In His mind, it is certain.

SIX: Thy Kingdom Come

If the kingdom is here now, either as the Church or "in the hearts of men," why would Christ command His servants to continually pray, "thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:9-10; Luke 11:2)? If at least the *beginnings* of the kingdom were here, or if the Church is the kingdom, wouldn't Christ have commanded His followers to pray "thy kingdom *grow* and *spread*"?

SEVEN: Seeking the Kingdom

If God's kingdom is here now, why would Jesus tell His followers, "But *seek* you first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33)? If church members are already in the kingdom, why seek it? Again, would not Christ have told them to "first *spread* the kingdom"?

The Great Domino Effect

The Bible states that Satan is the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). If he can lead people to believe that God's kingdom is here now, then they will believe they are "born again." And if they are "born again," they must be "saved." If they are "saved," they cannot sin. If they cannot sin and break God's Law (I John 3:4), they do not need to actually keep the law, because righteousness is being "imputed" by Christ. If they do not keep God's Law—which defines His way of life (Rom. 13:10)—then they will no longer be a Christian (John 15:4-10, 14). This is exactly what Satan, your enemy, seeks.

Carefully examine the Bible for *all* that it says on every subject. Let it interpret itself. Only then will you grow in true biblical understanding!

What the Apostle Paul Preached

Paul preached the kingdom of God to the Gentiles. Yet, some believe that he preached a "different" gospel—again, unaware that it was Paul who pronounced a curse on anyone who did this (Gal. 1:8-9). However, while Paul preached the kingdom of God, notice two verses in Acts showing that he did not neglect the subject of Jesus' role in the salvation process.

First, Acts 19:8 establishes which gospel he preached: "And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the *kingdom of God*." In many of his epistles, he taught the kingdom to Gentile congregations. Like Jesus, Paul's message was always the same. He continually preached, taught and referred to the *kingdom of God*.

Next, Paul states in Acts 20:25, 21, "I have gone preaching *the kingdom of God*…repentance toward God, AND *faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*." He preached the same gospel to both Jew and Gentile.

Now notice Acts 28:30-31: "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, AND *teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*."

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, differentiates between preaching about the *kingdom of God* and preaching about *Jesus Christ*! While both are vitally important, they are clearly two *separate* subjects!

In Acts 8:12, the deacon Philip also preached both of these same teachings: "But when they believed Philip…concerning the kingdom of God, AND the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." We see that Philip preached the kingdom of God and differentiated it from the teaching *about* Christ. Remember, the messenger is not the message.

Notice that these in Samaria were baptized only after "they believed" the right message—not some human idea about it. Also, Christ's name was taught as an all-important, but additional, understanding.

Jesus Christ's Person is *not* the gospel. However, He does stand directly *alongside* the true gospel and *will* rule the entire Earth when He returns and establishes His kingdom. Do not lose sight of this!

Finally, consider another verse in which Paul himself made a distinction between the *gospel* and the *person* of Christ. II Corinthians 11:4 contains this powerful warning: "For if he that comes preaches

another Jesus, whom we have not preached…or *another gospel* which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him" (the margin more correctly renders this last phrase "with *me*").

Paul wanted the Corinthians to reject false teachers and hold to what *he* had taught them. The point here is that Paul distinguishes between the teaching of a *false Jesus* and that of a *false gospel*. These are—and always have been—two separate things.

Some become confused when they read I Corinthians 15:1-4, thinking that Paul contradicts himself by stating that "the gospel" (vs. 1) is "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day" (vs. 3-4). Simply note that "the gospel" reference in verse 1 is not connected to Christ's death for our sins and burial in verses 3 and 4. Careful reading reveals this. When correctly understood, rather than saying that Christ is the gospel, this passage confirms the opposite, and supports Acts 8:12, 20:21-25, 28:31 and II Corinthians 11:4!

Since Jesus preached "repent and believe the gospel," it should now be clear why. His role must always be preached in conjunction with the kingdom of God, because one cannot enter the kingdom unless he understands and accepts that "Christ died for our sins," and that person has repented of his sins.

Ask yourself: If Christ IS the gospel—is the kingdom of God—then why did Paul (four times) and Philip speak of them *as two separate matters?*

Separate Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Recall, yet again, Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." What is the "gospel *of Jesus Christ*"? Is this a different, second gospel? Regarding Paul, we could ask, on the other hand, did he forget about *this* gospel?

No! But most modern preachers teach that the gospel *of* Jesus Christ is *about* Jesus Christ. They claim that He *is* the kingdom of God—that the gospel of the kingdom refers exclusively to Him. But this is not what the Bible says! The gospel of Christ is His gospel—His *message* about the KINGDOM OF GOD!

Messengers carry messages. Remember, Christ was a Messenger sent from God with an announcement. His message was not about Himself—it was about the kingdom of God! In John 12:49-50, Jesus said, "For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlast-

ing: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak."

Plainly, Christ functioned as a messenger—a representative—a SPOKESMAN for the coming kingdom of God.

In John 14:24, Jesus said, "The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me." Christ brought the Father's message. This should now be clear! Recall that He stated, "The law and the prophets were [preached] until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16:16).

That is what Christ's Church is doing today, and, through this book, the kingdom of God is being preached to you. This requires context.

The Kingdom of God Must Still Be Preached Today

In the Matthew 24 (and 25) Olivet Prophecy, Jesus was asked about those events that would be the signs of His Return and of "the end of the world [age]." He answered that a number of different trends and conditions would occur first. In verse 14, He stated, "And this *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the *end* come." The true gospel was prophesied to be preached until "the end come." This plainly means that *someone* will be preaching it now, in our present age—because the end has not *yet* come.

The Restored Church of God is doing this!

The Kingdom of God Is Coming

Make no mistake! Jesus Christ *will* soon return to Earth and establish His kingdom. No *human being* could set up a single, world-ruling government that could work. In late 1966, wondering about the possibilities, I asked my United States Congressman—once the Speaker of House—if he thought that this could ever happen. He had been in Congress for over 30 years, to that point. He loudly asserted that it was not possible. Interestingly, he did say that if he thought it could work, he would "shout it from the housetops." I shall never forget his words. He was absolutely right—it certainly would never work, *if left in the hands of men*! But this is not what Christ will do.

Recall that Daniel wrote, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: *and the kingdom shall not be left to other people*, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, *and it shall stand for-*

ever" (Dan. 2:44). The kingdom of God will reign over the entire Earth—ALL nations—and the resurrected saints shall share this reign with Christ.

Jesus stated in the "Sermon on the Mount" that "the meek…shall inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:5). Now you know why! Actually, Christ was quoting Psalm 37:11, where David said precisely the same thing. Other passages show that David knew he would one day rule (over all the tribes of Israel), within the kingdom of God.

Now turn to Daniel 7 and examine three separate verses. Notice verse 18: "But the *saints* of the Most High shall take the *kingdom*, and possess the *kingdom* forever, even forever and ever." Verse 22 states, "Until the Ancient of Days [Christ here, and the Father in verse 13] came, and judgment was given to the *saints* of the Most High; and the time came that the *saints* possessed the *kingdom*." Then notice verse 27: "And the *kingdom* and dominion, and the greatness of the *kingdom* under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the *saints* of the Most High, whose *kingdom* is an everlasting *kingdom*, and all dominions [rulers] shall serve and obey Him."

Daniel understood that the *saints* will reign on the Earth!

Now notice three separate passages in Revelation. Through John, Christ states, "To him that *overcomes* will I grant to sit with Me in My *throne*, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His *throne*" (3:21). Also notice 2:26-27: "And he that *overcomes*…to him will I give *power over the nations*: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron." And, finally, "and [God] has made us…kings and priests: and we shall *reign* on the earth" (5:10).

Has anyone ever told you about *any* of these verses? Almost certainly not. Yet, they are basic, and have been in the Bible for thousands of years!

No wonder that when Jesus was on trial for His life, He said, "My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom *not from here*" (John 18:36). Pilate had asked Him, "Are you a *king* then?" Christ answered, "*To this end was I born*, and for this cause came I into the world…" (vs. 37).

Jesus Christ understood throughout His life that He was born to be a king (Luke 1:31-33)!

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to also record, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to

the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth *the law*, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:2-4).

The exact same prophecy is repeated in Micah 4:1-3!

In front of the United Nations building is the sculptured image of a large man forging a plow from a sword. No one seems to take notice of, or even believe, the enormous prophecy this famous sculpture depicts.

Christ came to be a KING. When His reign begins, world peace will literally "break out"—along with worldwide happiness, prosperity, abundance and supreme joy! No human government has ever been able to bring these things to even *one country* on Earth.

This soon-coming kingdom is the core of the very gospel that Christ brought. Do you believe it? *Will* you believe it?

This kingdom, of which you can be a part, is coming soon to restore planet Earth…

The Coming Restoration

Sprinkled throughout the Old Testament, mainly in what are called the Major and Minor Prophets, are scores of prophecies describing a time of universal peace, prosperity and abundance. A time when war and nonstop bloodshed will be a thing of the past. A time when the nature of animals will be changed. A time when Jerusalem, a city in constant turmoil, will be a city of peace. A time when the entire Earth will worship the one true God. A time when the world peace mankind has desperately sought for thousands of years will finally be achieved.

All of this, and more, will occur during the rule of the Messiah, which we have proven is Jesus Christ.

But before these prophecies begin to be fulfilled, times of great trouble will occur. Jesus stated, describing one of these periods, "For then shall be *great tribulation*, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21).

Also notice Mark 13:19: "For in those days shall be *affliction*, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be."

Finally, in Jeremiah 30:5, 7: "For thus says the Lord; We have heard a voice of *trembling*, of *fear*, and not of peace…Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the *time of Jacob's trouble*…" This describes a separate and nearer period, now closing in on the unsuspecting nations of the West.

In the near future, times of untold trouble, suffering and destruction will strike the planet. Destruction will be everywhere, nations and cit-

ies laid waste. Air, land and waters polluted. Sickness, disease, famine, war, captivity and death will have decimated Earth's population. The world will be in a horrific state.

Earth will be desperately in need of restoration, which the Bible states *will* occur: "The *times of refreshing* shall come from the presence of the Lord. And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of *restitution* [restoration, reconstitution] of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).

The all-powerful, living Jesus Christ will eventually restore planet Earth to a condition that God had always intended. And the "saints of the most High" (Dan. 7:18, 27), or true Christians, will be resurrected to assist Christ in this restoration process. A new world—a new society, a new way of life, a truly *utopian world*—is coming!

God's Government on Earth

Christ's first task will be to bring peace and order to a war-torn, chaotic world. Having utterly failed, man's governments will be replaced by the perfect government of God. Though not a government *by* the people, it will truly be a government *for* the people—for the ultimate good of mankind. Greed, corruption, strife, endless debate, ineffectiveness and compromise in government will be no more.

A bright, shining, wonderful time will dawn, moving humanity past the dark events that will have transpired. God's government will be guided by and established on right judgment and true justice. Contrary to man's government, it will be capable of bringing lasting peace and safety.

Notice this: "Of the increase of His [Christ's] government and *peace* there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with *judgment* and with *justice* from henceforth even for ever" (Isa. 9:7).

Jesus Christ will have perfect insight and understanding into people's character. All decisions will be made in love, for the highest good of the people. This will be very different from today, when decisions are often made for the good of those who rule and to the detriment of citizens.

• The saints will administer God's perfect government under Christ. They will be beings who cannot be bribed or pressured to deal unjustly. They will not be induced to favor one person over

another. Respect of persons—favoritism—will be a thing of the past. The saints will judge as Christ does (Rev. 5:9-10).

• Jerusalem will eventually be World Headquarters for the kingdom of God. Christ will place His earthly throne there (Isa. 2:1-2; Zech. 8:3).

• All nations will look to Jerusalem for guidance (Jer. 3:17; Zech. 14:4).

• The kingdom of God's capital city will be the example for all nations to follow. Jerusalem will be rebuilt to splendor and magnificence—becoming a model city for all others to follow (Isa. 62:1-7).

For much more about exactly *how* the kingdom will arrive, read our free booklet *How God's Kingdom Will Come – The Untold Story!*

True Peace

Human history has been written in the bloody pages of war: "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. *The way of peace they know not*; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goes therein shall not know peace" (Isa. 59:7-8).

Man invariably seeks to solve his problems through violence and war. Countless battles have been waged to bring peace, yet man has never been able to achieve it for long. But we saw this will eventually change: "And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*" (Isa. 2:4).

The instruments of war—battleships, aircraft carriers, fighter jets, strategic bombers, cruise missiles, tanks, nuclear warheads sitting atop ICBM's, and all such military weapons—will not be designed or manufactured. All of what remains will be stripped apart, melted down and converted to machines for peaceful and agricultural uses. The war colleges—such as Annapolis and West Point—will not exist anymore. War, and its ways, tactics, strategies, implementation, will not be taught. Lives will not be lost to war and its lingering negative effects. Young men will stop being drafted into the military, taken from their homes and taught to hate the enemy. Instead, the way of peace, how to achieve and maintain it, will be taught.

• Peace will finally come to war-torn Israel. Her inhabitants will dwell in safety (Ezek. 28:25-26).

• From Israel and Jerusalem peace will spread to the entire world. All nations will look to Israel for guidance (Mic. 4:1-4).

• The Law of love, which produces peace, will be placed in the hearts and minds of Earth's inhabitants (Heb. 8:10-11).

A Pure Language

The world is divided by an endless number of languages and dialects, which create a huge barrier to right communication. But not for much longer. Notice: "For then will I turn to the people a *pure language*, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one consent" (Zeph. 3:9).

The multitude of today's corrupted languages, with all their variations, dialects and differences, will be relegated to history. Problems between nations and peoples resulting from miscommunication and misunderstanding will be gone. Artificial international barriers will disappear, as will miseducation and illiteracy. All will learn both the spoken and written pure language.

No longer will there be a word that can be pronounced multiple ways and with different meanings, which leads to communication problems. Slang, vulgar words and euphemisms will not exist. With one pure language, all peoples will serve and worship God with one voice, in one accord.

True Religion and Right Education

Satan, who "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9), will be banished (Lev. 16:10, 21-22) and no longer able to sway this world to evil and rebellion against God's revealed knowledge. With the devil restrained from influencing mankind, mass re-education can begin. Man will learn that there is both right and wrong education. True and false religion. Physical and spiritual knowledge. All of the wrong knowledge will be stripped away. Humanity will come to understand that the devil has been the true founder of man's educational systems and religions.

All will be taught that they have been eating from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," which has been the source of troubles. The world's false explanation for the origin of man—evolution—will be debunked, shown to be heretical science, and that instead of evolving to a higher order, man has become more degenerate and debased through his 6,000 years of self-rule.

The Bible will become the foundation of all education. God will be Supreme Educator. People will be taught how to *live*, not just how to earn a living. They will learn that the way to peace, prosperity, happiness and abundance comes only from divine revelation.

Again, Jerusalem, the future seat of God's government on Earth, will set the standard: "And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:3).

Eventually—but this will not happen immediately—"the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

• People will be taught to fear, have reverence for and respect God—the starting point of true knowledge (Prov. 1:7).

• Their teachers will be ever-present, giving guidance and instruction in God's ways (Isa. 30:20-21).

• The knowledge of God's Way will be known by all peoples on Earth (Hab. 2:14).

• Egypt and Assyria will serve God (Isa. 19:21-25).

• Ethiopia will too (Psa. 68:31)!

• The whole Earth will keep God's Sabbaths and Feasts—week to week, year to year (Isa. 66:22-23; Zech. 14:16-21).

New Nature in Mankind

Since the Garden of Eden, man has taken the nature of his chosen teacher: the devil. Since he listened to Satan—rejecting revealed knowledge from His Creator, and the opportunity to understand spiritual matters by taking of the Tree of Life, symbolizing the Holy Spirit—a mind was formed in man that was purely physical—carnal: "For they [all mankind] that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh…For to be carnally minded is death…Because the carnal mind is enmity against [the enemy of] God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:5-8).

Thus, having this mind—this nature—it has been impossible for humanity to obey God's commandments and to love Him.

In the world to come, man's very nature will be changed from one that is an adversary of God to one that wants to serve, obey and love his Maker. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit [the Holy Spirit] will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart [a Jeremiah 17:9 heart] out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them (Ezek. 36:26-27).

• Beginning with Israel, all peoples will know their God. His laws will be put in their minds (Jer. 31:33-34).

• God will give man a new heart. He will give His Spirit to all human beings so they may walk in all His ways. They will be His people and He will be their God (Ezek. 11:19; Joel 2:27-28).

New Nature in Animals

Even the nature of wild animals will be restored to the condition that existed in Eden: "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Gen. 2:19-20).

Yet the following change soon happened: "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moves upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered" (Gen. 9:2).

Animals' nature turned against man and they became fearful of him.

This will change after the kingdom of God is established: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isa. 11:6-9).

• God will make a covenant with animals. Mankind will dwell safely and in peace alongside all "beasts of the field…fowls of heaven, and…creeping things" (Hos. 2:18).

• Man will no longer fear wild animals. The wild beasts' taste for flesh will be removed. Instead, they will eat grass like cows and sheep. Their wild nature will be replaced by a peaceful, tame disposition (Ezek. 34:25).

Mankind's Health

Because he has broken God's laws of health, man is plagued by every kind of health issue, sickness and disease. Ignorant of the principles that would produce healthy bodies and sound minds, man suffers from

heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, disabling arthritis, and a host of other ailments.

But God intended that man live and experience a healthy life—knowledge that will be restored to a humanity desperately in need: "Strengthen you the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isa. 35:3-6).

And this: "Then shall your light break forth as the morning, and *your health shall spring forth speedily*: and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your [rear guard]. Then shall you call, and the LORD shall answer; you shall cry, and He shall say, Here I am" (Isa. 58:8-9).

• People will no longer suffer sickness, as they will be taught how to lead healthy lives. They will be liberated from even the fear of sickness and disease. They will receive healing from their God; all their sins, both physical and spiritual, will be forgiven. This will result in radiant health for all (Isa. 33:24).

• With man's health restored, it will be normal to feel good—full of energy—as God had always intended (Jer. 30:17).

The Earth's Health

Man has overused and abused the planet he inhabits. No other living thing has had a greater impact. While capable of creating beautiful landscapes, orchards, gardens and estates, man has also misused this precious resource. In his desire to get more for himself, he has left vast areas of the planet scarred and barren, and the ground, air and waters polluted—no longer able to sustain life.

These dead places will all be healed and returned to their former state of fruitful productivity: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad…and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God…for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes" (Isa. 35:1-2, 6-7).

• Most of Earth will be made cultivable, with mountains and high hills leveled. Beautiful forests will spread across the face of the Earth for use in building homes and quality wood furniture. Parched lands will bubble with cool, refreshing springs (Isa. 41:14-20).

• The waste places will become like the Garden of Eden (Isa. 51:3).

• Oceans will be reduced in size, yielding more land for planting and living space (Isa. 11:15).

The Water's Health

As an important element of Earth's restoration, oceans, lakes, rivers and streams will be healed—cleansed from the industrial pollution of man's factories and greed-based system of modern agriculture. The ever-increasing dead zones of the oceans will once more be able to support life. Rivers contaminated with corrosive chemicals and artificial or petroleum-based fertilizers, thus rendering them void of life, will be healed.

Living waters will flow from the coming rebuilt physical Temple of God: "Behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house [Temple] eastward: for the forefront of the house stood toward the east, and the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar…at the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other…These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed.

"And it shall come to pass, that every thing that lives, which moves, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river comes.

"And it shall come to pass, that the fishers shall stand upon it from Engedi even unto Eneglaim; they shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.…And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine" (Ezek. 47:1-12).

Pure, clean, life-supporting waters, with miraculous healing properties will flow from the Temple in Jerusalem. It will cleanse polluted

seas and streams wherever it flows. Oceans and lakes will teem with fish and all manner of sea life.

• Even the Dead Sea will support life once again (Zech. 14:4, 8).

An Agrarian Society

In the Kingdom, there will be a shift away from a heavily industrialized and commercialized society, with all of its inherent health hazards and stress-filled, dog-eat-dog competitive work environment.

In its place will be a return to a more agrarian society based on God's principles of agriculture and animal husbandry. This slower paced, much-less-stressful way of living will lead to joyful, healthy families. Children will work alongside their parents in peace and safety preparing, planting and harvesting fields—raising sheep and cattle, and learning the value of hard work. Look again at this verse, but in a new light: "And He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it" (Mic. 4:3-4).

Then there is this: "Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all" (Jer. 31:12).

• Superabundance will result from a healed Earth. Food shortages will be a thing of the distant past (Amos 9:13).

• No more will a man's labor be spent in vain (Isa. 62:8-9).

• Rain will come at the right time, producing bumper crops (Isa. 30:23; Ezek. 34:26-27).

Urban Renewal

Today's cramped, overcrowded, rundown, crime-ridden cities will give way to well planned, clean, spacious urban centers, allowing room for agriculture while maintaining some industry. In the world to come, with Jerusalem as the model, cities will be safe—residents will be free from fear of criminals. There will be no need to fear neighbors—no worry about living next to someone who is mentally unbalanced, a sexual offender or murderer, for they will not exist.

Juvenile delinquents will be no more! The aged and elderly will be able to live in their homes and walk the streets of cities without fear of violence.

With properly planned cities, families can live productive lives. "Thus says the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus says the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:3-5).

• There will be clean, quality renovated cities, with plenty of room for agriculture (Amos 9:14-15).

• Cities will be just the right size, without overcrowding, and able to sustain healthy, happy families, with just the right amount of industry (Ezek. 36:4-11; 33-35).

• There will be happy cities, full of the voice of joy and gladness (Jer. 33:10-14).

A Sound Economy

Today's governments require exorbitant amounts of taxes—40 percent, 50 percent, or more—and often waste these funds on inefficient government projects and fix-the-world, band-aid approaches that ultimately do not solve anything. There are federal taxes, state taxes, local taxes, inheritance taxes, property taxes, gas taxes and hidden taxes of all kinds. This repressive system of taxation burdens many. It often punishes those who work hard and innovate, and unfairly rewards many who will not work. Only tax lawyers and accountants benefit from it.

Soon it will be replaced by a fair and equitable system of taxation that will relieve an over-taxed and financially burdened wage earning public. The time is coming when there will exist one fair "flat tax," which will bring blessings to all. But it will be *God's* "flat tax."

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse: for you have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:8-10).

Yes, a time of financial peace and security—of tremendous blessings—is just over the horizon! People will be educated in how to properly save and spend their money. And never again will inflation, a recession or a depression strip away the buying power of currency or destroy a person's economic well-being. A robust, stable economy will benefit all.

• Jerusalem will be the financial capital of Earth. Great wealth in the seas and oceans will be harvested—the gold and silver reserves that are mostly under water (Isa. 60:5).

Coming Soon!

Yes, a time without parallel is coming soon! It will be an era of great and wonderful endeavors—a time of refreshing and restoration to Earth and its inhabitants.

Upon Jesus Christ's Return, the sons of God, under Christ's leadership, will teach all nations the only way of life that produces universal success, abundance and security. Many years of harmony and peace will ensue.

The day will arrive when humanity, with help from Christ and the saints, will overcome sin and self-will, develop the mindset and righteous character of God, and thus qualify for eternal life.

What an incredible future lies just over the horizon!

12 Statements of Jesus Almost No One Believes

This chapter forms an inset. In it we will analyze 12 statements made by Jesus Christ, found in the Bible. Some are well-known; others are overlooked.

Hundreds of millions who claim to be Christian assume they understand and therefore accept—believe!—these statements. But the reality is that virtually no one does. The true Jesus Christ is *unknown to Christianity*—and so is the meaning of nearly all of His teachings!

Consider. Millions call Jesus “Lord,” which means “Master.” But how many truly view Him as their Master?

Millions worship Jesus according to what is commonly taught, without thoroughly proving it from their Bibles. But what did Christ say about “traditions of men”?

Millions observe Sunday, believing it to be “the Lord’s Day.” But what did Jesus say about the Sabbath?

Millions believe Christians are not to judge. Did Jesus say otherwise? If so, how are they to judge?

Millions believe they are “born again”—but are they? Or is one born again later, at another time?

Millions of professing Christians assume they are “saved” upon being “born again”—and that their salvation cannot be lost. Did Jesus teach otherwise?

Millions talk about the “love of God”—and believe they love Jesus. Sunday sermons are filled with the subject. How does Jesus define love?

Millions are aware of John 3:16, perhaps the most recited verse in the Bible. Is there a hidden element in this verse indicating that human beings do not have immortal souls?

Millions believe that tithing is no longer in effect. Ministers teach that Jesus never mentioned it in the New Testament. But is there a verse in which Jesus specifically addresses tithing?

Millions believe that when they die they will "go to heaven to be with the Lord." Did Jesus teach that no one has gone to heaven? If so, what is the reward of the saved?

Millions believe Jesus came to bring peace. Is it possible that He came to actually divide families?

And millions believe they are disciples of Jesus—but are they? How can you know for sure? Did Christ clearly state how to identify His true disciples?

Be prepared to learn things VERY FEW ministers accurately teach and VERY FEW people truly understand!

(1) Luke 6:46 – "Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Jesus asked this question near the conclusion of His well-known Sermon on the Mount. Have you ever considered it? Have you ever asked yourself whether Jesus is talking directly to YOU? Or do you assume He is talking to *others*?

More than two billion people refer to Jesus Christ as Lord, and many more have done so throughout the past 2,000 years. By calling Jesus Lord, they are saying He is their Master, whether knowingly or not.

Here are the implications: The Greek word translated Lord is *kurios*, and it means "supreme in authority, controller, master." Jesus is to have complete control over Christians. He is to be the supreme authority in their lives. He is to be their Master! Just as a servant is subject to his master or a child to his parents, Christians are subject to Christ. As servants (John 13:16), they are not permitted to choose to obey commands that are convenient for them, and disregard the rest. They are to obey His commands—all of them!

Countless numbers profess Jesus to be their Master, yet the reality is that *almost none* treat Him as One actually having authority over their lives, meaning their conduct, their behavior. Few yield to His commands—few really *obey* Him. Though millions call Jesus their Lord, their actions demonstrate He is not. Most do little more than pay lip service to Christ. (More on this later.)

This is why Jesus asked, “Why call you Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). He is asking why individuals profess Him to be their Master, and as such accept His authority over their lives, but do not *do*—OBEY—BELIEVE—His words. They fail to properly acknowledge Him as their Master by doing what He says.

Parallel to the Matthew 7 account quoted earlier, in verses 47-48, Christ explains the wisdom in hearing His words and *doing* them. (Keep in mind that these verses immediately follow Jesus asking why people call Him Master but do not obey Him.) “Whosoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings, and *does* them, I will show you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock [Jesus Christ].”

In verse 49, however, Jesus shows the folly of hearing His words and *not* doing them. “But he that hears, and does not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”

Not believing—or obeying—Christ is likened to foolishly building a house on shifting sand: Eventually, the disobedient, like the house, will fall. When storms (trials and temptations) come, they will not stand.

Sadly, most people are building their houses upon sand. They neither believe nor obey Jesus Christ. What about you? Are you obedient to the words of Christ? Are you sure?

To learn more about why obedience is necessary, read *The Ten Commandments – “Nailed to the Cross” or Required for Salvation?*

(2) Mark 7:7 – “Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Just prior to this statement, in verses 1-5, the Pharisees noticed Jesus’ disciples eating food with unwashed hands. They, seemingly innocently, asked, “Why walk not Your disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” (7:5).

The Pharisees were extremely meticulous in regard to washing items used in consuming food, such as their hands, cups, bowls, pots, utensils, etc. Over the years, they added numerous regulations—traditions—to God’s commandments, statutes and precepts. These traditions sometimes even came to supersede the laws of God, though He never authorized such license.

Cutting to the heart of the matter, Jesus responded, "Well has Esaias [Isaiah] prophesied of you *hypocrites*, as it is written, This people honor Me with their lips, *but their heart is far from Me*. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men*" (7:6-7).

This is a strong indictment of the religious elite! Jesus stated that the Pharisees professed to worship God with their lips, but inside they were FAR from Him. He realized they were not looking for an explanation. Instead, they sought an opportunity to accuse Him and His disciples of breaking tradition—or "commandments of men." Christ's disciples were not breaking any laws of God, yet the Pharisees acted as if this were the case. As such, Jesus labeled their worship *vain*, which means "to no purpose, fruitless."

Do you grasp this? Christ said that the Pharisees' worship was POINTLESS! They may have *believed* they were worshipping God, but Jesus revealed otherwise. Their worship was completely FRUITLESS because they obeyed laws of *men* rather than laws of *God*. They were hypocrites because they *appeared* to be holy men who obeyed God. The "religious authorities" had an outward appearance of religious holiness. But inwardly, they were "full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 23:27).

Jesus further elaborated, saying, "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the *tradition of men*, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do…Full well you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:8-9).

The Pharisees made the laws of God of no effect by establishing and following manmade traditions. (While God does authorize the use of traditions [II Thes. 2:15], they are never to supplant, or contradict, God's laws.) Even more so, they *rejected* God's commandments. Take a moment to read Mark 7:10-13, in which Jesus gives an example of the Pharisees nullifying the Law of God.

Like these of Christ's time, today's "religious elite" reject God's laws and instead hold to and teach the traditions of men: the trinity, Easter, Christmas, Sunday-keeping, the fallacy that God's Law has been "nailed to the cross," tithing is "done away," among a host of others too numerous to mention. In fact, most of the teachings of orthodox Christianity are manmade! The ministers of this world preach false doctrines and lead people away from God, just like the Pharisees did. If Jesus were on Earth today, He would indict these ministers in the same manner as the Pharisees!

Ask yourself whether YOU are worshipping Christ in vain. Do not assume this statement applies to others. Start with the assumption

that it applies to YOU! Investigate *why* you believe as you do—*why* you perhaps observe traditions of men, rather than laws of God.

To learn more about common traditions of men, be sure to investigate the extensive website of The Restored Church of God, *rcg.org*. There, throughout the vast library of material, you will begin to learn what God truly desires. Perhaps begin with *God's Holy Days or Pagan Holidays?* to learn the truth of popular religious holidays.

(3) Mark 2:27-28 – "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

Other than the trinity, no other doctrine is as widely accepted and staunchly defended in the world of traditional Christianity than Sunday-keeping. Though few who profess to be Christian can agree on biblical teachings, they almost always agree that the Saturday Sabbath has been superseded by Sunday worship. To be accepted as a "mainstream Christian," one generally must keep Sunday, to one degree or another.

If asked which day is the Christian Sabbath, most will answer, "Sunday." Perhaps they will add, "Sunday is the New Testament Sabbath because Jesus rose from the dead that day. By observing this day, we honor Jesus." They might even say, "The New Testament speaks of Christians going to Church on Sunday or Revelation 1:10 speaks of the apostle John being in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, which is a reference to Sunday."

Numerous clever arguments exist as to why Sunday is supposedly the day Christians are to assemble together and worship God. This unbiblical practice has been in effect so long—over 1,600 years—and is so common that few are able—or willing—to recognize clear scriptures that reveal the *true* Sabbath day, and its permanence. Most start with Sunday as the "Christian Sabbath" and then search for verses to support this idea—if they study at all—rather than beginning with an *open mind* and searching for clear passages on the subject, of which there are many. Even a quick study of the topic, with an open mind, will reveal the truth of the matter. Sadly, however, most are too steeped in this popular "tradition of men" to leave its powerful grip.

For those who read the Bible, how many times have you glossed over Mark 2:27-28? Or perhaps, with the Sunday fallacy as your basis, you have erroneously assumed this statement means that since He is Lord (or Master) of the Sabbath, Jesus must have changed it from Saturday to Sunday. Be honest with yourself.

Jesus' statement that He is "Lord of the Sabbath" is simple to understand when one considers who created the Sabbath day. As the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16), *Jesus* sanctified the Sabbath after re-creating the Earth, as seen in the book of Genesis: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work" (2:2-3).

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath because He *created it*, and set it aside as a day of rest! No scripture even hints that He set aside Sunday, which is why He did not say He is "Lord of Sunday"—or any other day.

Do not allow shallow arguments to persuade you that the Sabbath was "only for the Jews" or that Christ "did away with it"! It has been in effect—as holy time—since the foundation of the world. Man does not have the authority to establish or take away time that God has set aside as holy.

Many will argue that they keep the Sabbath "in their hearts" or "in Jesus." Similar to other plain biblical realities, such as the kingdom of God, the Sabbath is spiritualized away.

Considering that the Sabbath is a day of rest, ask yourself, how is it possible to keep the Sabbath, even "in the heart," while performing daily duties? Can you keep the Sabbath while running a marathon? While building a home? Or while performing any other activity? Of course not. Read Exodus 20:8-11. This human reasoning allows a person to obey the Sabbath as he or she sees fit—rather than as *God commands*! What He desires is not part of their thinking. They make the Law of God of no effect—just like the Pharisees!

Some might cite the account in Matthew 12 (a parallel account of Mark 2:23-28) as proof that Jesus did away with the Sabbath. Yet Christ was trying to make clear that it is lawful for a person to satisfy immediate hunger on the Sabbath, as David did, even though it was not lawful for anyone other than the Levites to eat the showbread (I Sam. 21:1-6).

The Pharisees concocted numerous manmade regulations governing the Sabbath that made it a *burden* on people rather than a *blessing*. This is what Christ condemned, not the day itself. How do we know? Because "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." In other words, Christ created the Sabbath day for man to enjoy. He did not create man for the Sabbath to enjoy. The Sabbath is to serve man, not the other way around! However, the

Pharisees—who were not authorized to amend God's laws—made the Sabbath into a day for man to serve; thus it became a burden.

This is yet another example of Mark 7:7-9. The only difference today is that, rather than making the Sabbath a burden, misguided ministers have made the Sabbath of no effect! They have jumped to the other extreme.

To gain a complete understanding of the Sabbath, we recommend you thoroughly study the book *Saturday or Sunday – Which Is the Sabbath?* You will be surprised from where the practice of Sunday-keeping originated and who authorized it.

(4) John 7:24 – "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

Some will quote Matthew 7:1—"Judge not, that you be not judged"—to claim that it is "unchristian" to identify people's sins or those that plague a society. How many times have you heard someone say, "Don't judge me" or "Christians are not to judge others"?

Ask yourself, how can a Christian be expected to stay away from people of bad character, as the Bible commands (I Cor. 5:1-5; I Tim. 6:3-6), if he is not allowed to judge their actions—in other words, identify their inappropriate behavior? Also, how could Paul instruct Christians to "mark" and "avoid" divisive people (Rom. 16:17) unless the conduct of such people be examined—unless judgments were made?

The word "judge" in Matthew 7:1 comes from the Greek word *krino*, which can mean "to try, condemn, punish" or "to distinguish, decide." The context depends upon how the word is used.

The apostle John wrote, "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn [krino] the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Yet, Paul used this same Greek word to teach that true Christians are in training to judge the whole world—including angels: "Do you not know that the saints shall judge [krinos] the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know you not that we shall judge [krinos] angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (I Cor. 6:2-3). Four chapters later, he added, "I speak as to wise men; judge [krinos] you what I say" (I Cor. 10:15). Obviously, Paul did not intend for the Corinthians to condemn his words, but rather to judge—"decide"—whether he was teaching sound doctrine.

When Jesus said, "Judge not, lest you be judged," He meant that you can sometimes avoid judgment coming upon yourself by avoid-

ing judging others. This does not mean that Christians are *never* to judge. Rather, in certain situations, it is better to avoid rendering a judgment—a decision about, an evaluation of conduct or behavior—lest you bring judgment upon yourself. If you decide to judge, be careful, as whatever standard you use to render a decision will be used on yourself: "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2).

Consider. If Jesus had meant Christians should never judge, period, then He would have contradicted Himself when He said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge [krinos] righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Christ clearly stated that Christians *are* to judge others. However, we are to use *righteous judgment*. If a person judges righteously, he will avoid judgment coming upon himself.

Most overlook John 7:24 and focus only on Matthew 7:1. They fail to put all of the pieces of the puzzle together, thus they stumble and are snared (Isa. 28:13).

The key to understanding John 7:24 is found beginning three verses earlier. Referring to His healing a man on the Sabbath day, to which the Pharisees vehemently objected, "Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel." According to the Pharisees, healing on the Sabbath was considered work, so they accused Him of breaking the Sabbath.

In verses 22-23, Jesus continues His discourse: "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision…and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. [According to the Law of Moses, a male child was to be circumcised eight days after being born, which would sometimes fall on the Sabbath.] If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at Me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?"

The Pharisees constantly accused Christ of deviating from the Law of Moses. They claimed to uphold this law down to the last jot and tittle. Jesus used this to His advantage and asked them why they considered it lawful to circumcise a child on the Sabbath, but unlawful to make "a man every whit whole"? Christ pointed out the hypocrisy of such "logic." (Recall the example we examined earlier concerning Mark 2:27-28.)

This brings us to verse 24: "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." Jesus said this to the Pharisees in this context because they were judging his actions according to *sight*, and not by *God's Law*. In other words, they used human reasoning rather

than God's standard of righteousness, defined by His Law! Thus, they brought judgment upon themselves!

While Jesus was in the flesh, He too had to rely on God to judge righteously: "I can of My own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; *because I seek not My own will*, but the will of the Father which has sent Me" (John 5:30). Since the Pharisees were not seeking the will of God and were not obeying His commandments, they could not judge correctly.

Finally, consider Christ's statement in John 8: "You judge after the flesh; I judge no man. And yet if I judge, My judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me" (vs. 15-16). These verses reveal that Jesus did not judge *after the flesh* or according to sight. Instead, He judged *righteously*, because He relied on the Father, just as Christians are to do. The Father did the judging through Jesus. But this occurred only because Jesus sought the Father's will and obeyed Him, as Christians are to do.

Like so many of the Bible's teachings, the subject of judging is widely misunderstood. This is because the majority focuses only on Matthew 7:1 and does not take into account the numerous other verses on the subject. Again, most fail to put all of the pieces of the large biblical puzzle together (Isa. 28:10).

(5) John 3:6 – "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

It is widely taught and believed that, to be a true Christian, one must be "born again" by the Holy Spirit. Millions of professing Christians define themselves as having experienced this "spiritual rebirth," claiming it occurs when an individual accepts Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. Being born again is reduced to a spiritual *feeling* that supposedly occurs at conversion, rather than an actual "real life" birth. A series of statements spoken by Jesus in the book of John is used to support this popular teaching.

In an exchange with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). It is clear that for a person to see God's kingdom, he *must* be born again. There is no other way.

This idea of being born again confused Nicodemus. He could not understand how a human being could experience a second birth, as verse 4 indicates: "Nicodemus said unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (vs. 4).

This is certainly a fair question, one that would naturally come to mind when learning that a person must be born a second time.

In verse 5, Jesus responded, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Here, Jesus begins to expound upon His statement in verse 3. Rather than merely saying that one must be born again to enter the kingdom of God, He explains that a person must be born of water and of the Spirit.

The mention of water in this statement applies to baptism—being fully immersed in water. Baptism symbolizes a person's old self being buried in a "watery grave." The person is then raised from the water a new individual and is to live the remainder of his life in obedience to the Father and Jesus Christ. In effect, such a person is "born of water."

"Born of water" also refers to the physical birth that every human being experiences. While in the mother's womb, a baby is surrounded and protected by a sac of water-like liquid called *amniotic fluid*. This fluid cushions the baby to keep him safe and protects from infection. Just before birth, this water "breaks," signaling that delivery is about to occur. Thus, everyone can say that he has experienced *this* birth. But the next type of birth is different.

The mention of the Spirit references the moment of being born again, or born of the Spirit. Most people believe this occurs when one supposedly accepts Jesus into his heart. They believe it is possible to be born again and remain a flesh and blood human being.

But notice Jesus' statement in verse 6: "That which is *born of the flesh is flesh*; and that which is *born of the Spirit is spirit*." How clear! This means it is IMPOSSIBLE for anyone who is a human being—flesh and blood—to have been born again. Those who are born of the flesh, or of a woman, are flesh—period! But those who are born of the Holy Spirit are Spirit. It is that simple.

To remove all doubt, in verses 7 and 8, Jesus elaborates, "Marvel not that I said unto you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it lists, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and where it goes: *so is every one that is born of the Spirit*."

You need not marvel at these words. Jesus compared those who are born again to wind. We can see and feel the effects of wind—trees swaying, debris being tossed through the air, etc.—but cannot see wind itself. Likewise, when an individual is born of the Spirit, other human beings will not be able to see him, because he will be composed of spirit—not flesh and blood. God is a Spirit and cannot be seen; the same will be true of Christians at the resurrection.

We must ask: Of those who claim to be born again, do you see anyone who is a spirit being? No. They are still flesh! Yet they erroneously assume they are born again, despite Jesus' plain teaching.

When is one truly born again? At the resurrection of the dead, when Christ returns in full power and glory! "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's *at His coming*" (I Cor. 15:22-23).

Christians are born again "at His coming"—not before!

Now here is what happens at the resurrection: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [body from human birth] must put on immortality [divine body at spirit birth]" (vs. 51-53).

Just one verse prior, Paul stated, "Now this I say, brethren, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*" (vs. 50). Paul clearly revealed that those who believe they are born again and in the kingdom of God now, while in the flesh, are in error. Human beings CANNOT inherit the kingdom of God before they have been changed—born again!—into spirit beings.

Will you believe your Bible? Or will you cling to traditions of men?

To learn more on this subject, you will want to read *What Does "Born Again" Mean?* This extensive booklet thoroughly addresses every vital question you may have about this subject.

(6) John 14:15 – "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

If you are one of the roughly two billion people who profess to be Christian, and someone asked whether you love Jesus Christ, you would no doubt answer yes. But what would you do if asked to prove it? What solid evidence would you provide?

To most, love is little more than a feeling, a vague idea that cannot be properly defined. Ask 100 people to define love and you will receive 100 different responses—everything from a feeling in the heart to just "doing good" to others. Diversified ideas occur because few consult the only source that provides an absolute definition.

Notice how the Bible defines love: "Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10).

What law? The Law of God—as expressed overall in the Ten Commandments! The Bible defines love as obedience to God's laws. It is that simple. There is no ambiguity or confusion whatsoever! Yet those who profess to be Christian are confused about, or ignorant of, the true definition of love.

Also read I John: "For this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments*: and His commandments are not grievous" (5:3). Many who claim to have love believe that God's Commandments *are* grievous. But God clearly states they are not! Paul called the Law of God "holy, and just, and good…spiritual" (Rom. 7:12, 14).

The first four commandments—not serving false gods, not making or worshipping images (idols) of God, not taking God's name in vain, and observing the Sabbath—reveal how to love God; the remaining six—honoring one's father and mother, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, and not coveting—reveal how to love other human beings. When one obeys the Law of God, he *automatically* shows love—toward God and toward others. And it is easily verifiable that one is showing love either toward God or others because *action* is required in obeying God.

When one obeys any of the last six commandments, he—whether knowingly or not—is outwardly indicating love toward his fellow human beings. Consider the Seventh Commandment for a moment. Though an ever-increasing number of people are breaking it, most would agree that committing adultery is *not* showing love toward one's spouse. Few, if any, would suggest otherwise. Think of the devastation that results: broken trust, broken marriages, broken homes, broken relationships with children, etc. By not committing adultery, a man or woman shows love toward their spouse.

Similarly, when a person obeys any of the first four commandments, he is showing love toward God. Sadly, however, most do not live according to these commandments—and thus do *not* truly love God, despite what they may proclaim.

Jesus knew full well that most only *profess* with their mouths that they love Him—but their hearts are far from obeying Him (Matt. 15:18). This is why He said, "If you love Me, keep [obey] My commandments" (John 14:15). Six verses later, He added, "He that has My commandments, *and keeps them*, He it is that loves Me" (vs. 21). Nowhere in the Bible does Jesus say, "He who professes He loves Me—yet breaks My commandments—is He who loves Me."

What about you? Do you believe Jesus' plain words that, to truly love Him, you must be obedient—you must keep His command-

ments—which requires action? Or will you believe the smooth, cunning words of false ministers who teach that it is not necessary to obey God—despite Jesus' plain statements to the contrary?

(7) John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

One could make a case that this is the most popular verse in Scripture. Seemingly, everyone is able to quote it verbatim, even those who are not familiar with the Bible. This verse is usually mentioned in the context of explaining the love that God has for mankind. He sacrificed His Son so billions of human beings would have an opportunity to receive eternal life.

But most fail to notice a subtle point in this verse: Human beings do not possess immortal souls!

The vast majority of professing Christians believe that within every individual is an immortal soul that goes either to heaven or hell upon death. Most ministers, evangelists and religionists speak of "when we all get to heaven" or the "reality of an ever-burning hell" waiting to eternally roast those who do not "give their hearts to the Lord."

What most fail to recognize is that if human beings possess immortal souls, then it means they *already have* eternal life! But Jesus said that "whosoever believes in Him should not *perish*, but have *everlasting life*" (John 3:16). There is a definitive contrast in this statement between perishing and eternal life.

How is it possible that human beings could perish if they have immortal souls? The answer: impossible! Otherwise, Jesus' statement in John 3:16 is not sensible. Why state that His death and resurrection opens the door to eternal life if everyone *already* has it within them?

Those who do not believe in Jesus—which means those who fail to submit to His authority over their lives, who reject the Law of God—will perish for eternity! They will *not* be given eternal life. See Revelation 21:8.

Notice that Romans 6:23 also contrasts death from eternal life: "For the wages of sin is *death*; but the gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is in perfect harmony with John 3:16.

The Greek word translated from "perish" is *apollumi*, which means "to destroy fully, to die, lose, perish." There is no doubt what these words mean. "Perishable" items, such as fruits and vegetables,

are those that rot—until they are "fully destroyed" or "lost." This is not hard to understand when one is talking about anything other than a human being. Those who receive salvation are promised that they "should not perish" but "have everlasting life"!

If hell were a place of eternal torture, then the people suffering there have eternal life. But John 3:16 says, "should not *perish*," which does not mean "should not suffer eternal life in torment." If it did, then the rest of the verse—"but have everlasting life"—would not make sense.

Have you ever thought about John 3:16 in this light?

Of course, some will say that the words "perish" and "death" do not mean we cease from being alive. Rather, they contend we are simply alive somewhere else, either in heaven or hell, despite plain biblical teaching to the contrary. See Psalm 146:3-4, 115:17 and Ecclesiastes 9:5.

This explanation does not permit an examination of all the clear verses indicating what happens upon death. For much more detail, read *The Awesome Potential of Man*.

(8) Matthew 23:23 – "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

Most professing Christian churches teach that, among other laws of God, Jesus abolished tithing. The thinking is that tithing was an Old Covenant law, and Jesus' death supposedly freed His followers from such "harsh, legalistic rules and regulations." Many will cite a lack of a clear tithing command in the New Testament as proof it is no longer in effect.

In Matthew 23, Jesus *does* give a clear command to tithe! But most overlook it. In verse 23, when Jesus said, "and not to leave the other undone," He meant the Pharisees were correct in tithing—and should continue to do so! In other words, tithing is still in effect! Notice Jesus did *not* say, "These [judgment, mercy and faith] ought you to have done, and not concern yourselves with the other [tithing]."

The argument is often raised that this verse teaches tithing is not important—that it is least among God's laws. But verse 23 does not state this. It merely states that the Pharisees neglected *weightier* aspects of God's Law. Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees that they should have been as meticulous in areas of faith, mercy and

rendering proper judgments as they were in tithing. A careful reading of the verse and context reveals Jesus was not saying that tithing is "unimportant," as many claim.

Within God's Law, there are small and large points. Some commands carry more "weight" than others. Jesus clearly acknowledges this. If one were to assign importance to tithing compared to judgment, mercy and faith, the latter are indeed more important in building God's holy, righteous character, which is necessary for entering the kingdom of God. But this does not mean tithing and all other "lesser" laws are of no value or no longer binding!

Jesus explained that tithing is something that people must not "leave undone"!

In Matthew 24, Jesus gave an extraordinary prophecy of what His Church would be doing at the end of the age. Notice: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (vs. 14).

Taking the true gospel to the world (doing "the Work," as it is often called) requires significant funding. God's Church must continually hire more staff to perform the many functions of running a growing worldwide organization. It publishes a vast number of books, booklets, magazines and other types of literature, teaching God's truth. Also, the true Church has members around the world who need to be fed the spiritual truth of God by faithful ministers and elders (John 21:15-16; Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2). The number of those whom God is calling is expanding and will continue to expand as the age draws to a close.

Yet both preaching the gospel and feeding the flock require money!

It is through the biblical principle of tithing that God finances His Work and feeds His flock. This is how He finances all that He does. Doing His Work is how He chooses to spend *His* tithe. Without tithes, there would be no Work—no good news of the soon-coming kingdom of God being announced to all nations!

For much more on tithing, read *End All Your Financial Worries*. This thorough booklet will clear up any misconceptions you may have about this most crucial subject and help you determine to whom God's tithes should be given.

(9) Matthew 24:13 – "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."

Have you ever heard the phrase "Once saved always saved"? It is a common saying in the realm of traditional Christianity. The belief is

that once a person acknowledges Jesus as their Lord and Savior and "accepts Him into his heart," he is "saved"—his salvation sealed, and he is on his way to heaven upon death. No matter what a person may do from that point forward, religionists claim his salvation cannot be lost.

Yet Jesus said, "He that shall endure unto the *end*, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13). The end of what? A person's life! In other words, only those who endure—persevere!—the many tests and trials associated with being a true Christian either until the end of their lives or the Return of Christ will be saved—and no one else! According to Jesus, salvation does not occur at the moment of conversion, but culminates at the end of one's life.

Contrary to popular belief, a Christian can lose salvation. He can be truly converted—receive the Holy Spirit—and then spiritually "abort." This is because salvation is a *process*, not a moment.

Romans 6:23 explains that the wages of sin is death. At repentance, baptism and conversion, a Christian is forgiven by the blood of Christ and is immediately saved from the penalty of past sins. In one sense, it can be said that the person has been "saved," at that precise moment, from death.

But this is not the end of the story. There are two more applications of when and how a person is saved.

The second way is the most obvious—receiving eternal life—the pinnacle of salvation. This occurs at the resurrection of the dead in Jesus (I Cor. 15:50-55; I Thes. 4:13-18), upon His Return. This is to occur in the future!

But no one receives eternal salvation now. All must first undergo a life of trial, testing, learning, growing and overcoming, thus building the very character of God!

The third way one is saved is that he is "being saved"—a process that occurs throughout his lifetime. Many verses reveal that spiritual begettal of the Holy Spirit does not mean one will automatically receive salvation. Only a careless reading of the Bible would indicate this. To believe that salvation is complete upon conversion is to ignore all of the scriptures clearly indicating that salvation can be lost, such as Hebrews 10:26-27 and I Corinthians 9:24-27, among *many* others.

Consider. If human beings are saved at the moment of conversion, then what would be the point of continuing to live? Why would God not immediately take them directly to whatever is the afterlife after they "accept the blood of Jesus"? Furthermore, why would God inspire a book—the Bible—that is thousands of words? The Bible

would only need to be a sentence or two. And why all the scriptures about striving against sin?

Will you believe Jesus' plain statement that you must endure to the end to be saved?

Be sure to read *Just What Is Salvation?* to gain the complete picture on salvation, and learn why most are deceived.

(10) John 3:13 – "No man has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

Newspaper obituaries often speak of people who "passed away" and "went home to be with the Lord." Others write that their departed loved one is "looking down on us right now" from heaven.

Many speak of being "bound for glory in heaven," but are unsure of what this really means. The most common ideas are that everyone will "ride clouds, play harps, walk the streets of gold in front of the pearly gates, sit in rocking chairs" and just "roll around heaven all day."

No matter what one may believe will occur in heaven, *nearly everyone* believes they will go there upon death.

Yet, in John 3:13, Jesus clearly states that no one has ascended to heaven! This statement is most plain. No one means no one! There should be no room for confusion.

You might be wondering, "If no one is in heaven, then what is a Christian's reward?"

Several verses later, Jesus begins to reveal the answer: "I go [to heaven] to prepare a place for you" (14:2). Most assume Jesus is referring to preparing a place in heaven. Yet in the very next verse, Jesus said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again [to the Earth], and receive you unto Myself; *that where I am, there you may be also*" (vs. 3).

Where is this?

Many are familiar with Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." A clear statement on a Christian's reward is found in this series of scriptures. However, it does not contain the word "heaven." While most know of this sermon, few know of this important verse: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit *the earth*" (Matt. 5:5).

Psalm 37:11 states the same thing. It would not have been strange for Jesus to reference Psalms, since all His listeners would have been familiar with this scripture. But to have said that "the meek shall inherit heaven" would have been strange to their ears. Amazingly,

the opposite is true today! Most think it is strange to believe that Christians will inherit the Earth!

Consider what the apostle John recorded in the book of Revelation: "And has made them [true Christians] unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign *on the earth*" (Rev. 5:10).

The reward of God's saints is future rulership "on the Earth"—as "kings and priests."

How obvious!

In Matthew 25, Jesus describes His Return to "sit upon the throne of His glory: And before Him shall be gathered all nations" (vs. 31-32). Jesus is pictured in this parable as ruling all the nations of the Earth—*on the Earth*, not in or from heaven! At that point, He says to the saints, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (vs. 34).

Right now, Jesus is in heaven preparing a kingdom for His people to inherit on Earth! Christians will *not* join Jesus in heaven. He will "come again" to Earth, where true Christians will join Him!

Very few people understand this fundamental biblical teaching.

Will you believe the plain words of Jesus Christ? Will you believe His statements that "no man has ascended up to heaven"—and that the meek "shall inherit the earth"?

For much more information on heaven and a Christian's reward, read *Do the Saved Go to Heaven?*, *What Is Your Reward in the Next Life?* and again *The Awesome Potential of Man*.

(11) Matthew 10:34-35 – "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law."

The majority believes that Jesus came to bring peace to Earth. Many feel it is their Christian duty to similarly spread "peace," because, trying to parallel Him, "that's what Jesus did." Yet, in these verses, Jesus Christ states something entirely different: He reveals He came to bring "a sword" and set "at variance" (Greek: make apart, sunder, alienate) family members. In verse 36, Jesus adds, "A man's foes shall be *they of his own household*."

In other words, Christ divides families! How is this possible?

To come to a proper understanding of this statement, we must first recognize that God is calling only a *small number* of people into His Church at this time. Yet most believe that God is trying to save *everyone* now, in this age; the thinking is that God and the devil are at war

over the fate of mankind. There is supposedly a desperate struggle between good and evil—God and Satan.

IF God were calling everyone now, then He is failing miserably in His battle with the devil for control over the fate of all men. Of the estimated over 7 billion people today, only about one-third believe, to one degree or another, in the name of Jesus Christ. This represents a total that includes every conceivable brand of the more than 2,000 different forms of professing Christianity. If the war to "win souls" is as most professing Christian ministers depict it, then the devil is much stronger and much more effective in his effort than is God.

Of course, God *is* stronger than Satan, and He is not in a war to "save souls." He simply is not calling a large number of people in this age. Rather, He is calling a tiny few to qualify to rule in the kingdom of God when He will begin to call *all* human beings (Jer. 31:31-34; Dan. 7:14)!

In the book of John, Jesus stated, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him" (6:44). However, billions believe they *can* come to Jesus on their own volition. They assume the choice is theirs to make. But Jesus says it is not!

Twenty-one verses later, Jesus repeated to His audience, "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father" (vs. 65). In the next verse, John records, "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."

The many thousands who heard Jesus simply could not understand that the Father has to "draw" people and that a calling is something "given" to them. Otherwise, they *cannot* come to Jesus and understand His words. It is simply impossible! It is not natural for human beings to seek God and obey Him (Rom. 3:10-12) because, as we have seen, "the carnal mind is enmity [hostile] against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7).

In other words, the carnal mind is God's enemy! Only when one is called can he truly seek God.

With this briefest of backdrops, we can now examine Jesus' statement in Matthew 10.

Since God is calling only a small number into His Church today, it can be expected that He would not, in most cases, call an entire family. In fact, history has shown that God very rarely calls the majority in a family. He may call a son, and not the parents—or the parents, but not the son and/or daughter. Sometimes, God chooses to call one spouse and not the other. This often leads to disagreements within marriages and families, depending upon whether those not yet called are willing

to accept changes in the individual who is called. Some are willing, and some are not.

When learning the truths of God, a person begins to see that he must change certain areas of his life. He learns that a Christian is one who repents of his former conduct and disobedience to God. He changes his ways. He learns to refrain from eating unclean meats; to observe the Sabbath and not work from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday; observe God's seven annual Holy Days, which reflect His overarching plan for mankind; obey God's financial laws; not celebrate holidays of pagan origin, such as Christmas, Easter and New Year's; among numerous other changes.

These sweeping, and sometimes sudden, alterations to one's life can cause family members to become resentful—even fiercely angry!—with the person God is calling. They find that they cannot accept his refusing to celebrate Christmas with them, as may have been done for decades. Or they are unable to tolerate his not being available for family outings on Saturday. They may grow to despise the new person that he is becoming.

It is the natural result of applying His teachings through which Jesus brings a "sword" to families. Such situations can bring division, resentment, hostility—sometimes even separation—when one person is called to obey God, while others are not.

Understand, however, that Jesus does not intentionally divide families. Rather, division is a byproduct of a person being called into God's Church.

(12) John 8:31 – "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed."

As we saw earlier, more than two billion people profess to be followers of Jesus. They believe they are His disciples, or *students*. A student is one who learns from his teacher and applies what he has learned. Yet most who claim to be Christ's disciples fail to learn and apply what He teaches. Are they then His disciples?

No!

Jesus clearly states that only those who continue in His word are His disciples. The Greek word for "continue" means "to stay, abide, continue, dwell, endure, remain, stand." In other words, one must *obey* Jesus' words to be considered His disciple! Students of Jesus apply what they learn. This requires action and obedience—not merely a profession of belief!

Amazingly, in John 8:37, those who professed to "believe on Jesus" (verse 30) actually sought to kill Him! Jesus said, "You seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you" (vs. 37). He further added, "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man that has told you the truth" (vs. 40). Many *say* they want to hear the truth—but not if it means being told they are wrong, particularly about cherished ideas, and must amend their conduct.

This biblical account comes to a remarkable conclusion. Jesus asked, "Why do you not understand My speech?" He then answered, "…because you cannot hear My word" (vs. 43).

How could people standing right beside Christ "not hear His word"? Because "He that is of God hears God's words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God" (vs. 47).

Those who are of God hear His words *and* do them! (See Matthew 7:21, John 3:19-21, Romans 2:13 and James 1:22.)

Most today who profess to "believe on Jesus" are no different from those described in John 8. They proclaim to believe Him—they claim to be His disciples—yet fail to abide in His teachings.

According to Jesus, His *true* disciples are identified by their obedience to Him!

Will YOU Believe Christ?

Now we must ask: Will you believe the teachings of the *true* Jesus Christ? Or will you believe the soothing words of false ministers who preach the teachings of "*another* Jesus" (II Cor. 11:4)? Which Jesus will YOU obey?…

Vain Worship—and Another Jesus

More than two billion people claim to worship the God of the Bible and to be followers of Jesus Christ. They worship in divided, competing churches, religious organizations, denominations, groups and movements of varying beliefs, governments and traditions.

Yet Christ said His Church would be a "little flock" (Luke 12:32)—undivided, "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:10)—in "one accord" (Acts 2:46), continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching] and fellowship" (vs. 42)—all speaking the same thing, just as the first-century Church had done.

But today's professing Christians *are* divided by doctrine, which is why they do not—and cannot—walk together (Amos 3:3). How can so many churches and their adherents say they are Christian, yet teach opposing beliefs and traditions? Why are so few willing to ask what is wrong?

Again, these churches cannot *all* be right.

Jesus warned, "Not everyone that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21). He said, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils [demons]? And in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you*: depart from Me, you that work iniquity" (vs. 22-23).

There are entire television channels devoted to popular religious leaders who preach boldly, as though they carry authority, who claim

to heal the sick and cast out demons, who say they are preaching the gospel—but in reality proclaim a message entirely *about* Christ rather than the good news He declared: the arrival of the kingdom of God!

Of such people, God states, "Her priests have violated My law, and have profaned My holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shown difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them" (Ezek. 22:26).

The so-called ministers and lay members of modern Christendom make a dazzling show of worshipping God—but all in VAIN.

Manmade Laws, Traditions That Counter God's Law

In Mark 7, the scribes and Pharisees criticized Christ's disciples for not ceremoniously washing their hands before eating. The issue wasn't about hygiene; the Pharisees believed that certain things outside the body (such as accidently eating a speck of dirt or an unclean insect) could defile them in God's eyes.

But Jesus taught, "That which comes out of the man, *that* defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: *all these evil things come from within, and defile the man*" (vs. 20-23).

As we saw in Chapter Three, to supposedly ensure Judah was never again punished by God for disobedience, religious leaders created numerous meticulous laws, codes and traditions that turned obedience to God's commandments statutes and laws into an unnecessary burden. For example, they created laws, based on human reasoning, detailing *exactly* how far one can walk on the Sabbath or *exactly* how many ears of corn one can pluck before breaking it.

The Pharisees were more concerned with keeping the technical points of God's laws than with upholding their spiritual application.

Notice: "Woe unto you, you blind guides, which say, *Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor*! You fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, *Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever swears by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty*. You fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, swears by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, swears

by it, and by Him that dwells therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by Him that sits thereon" (vs. Matt. 23:16-22).

Also, "For Moses said, Honor your father and your mother; and, Whoso curses father or mother, let him die the death: But you say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever you might be profited by me; he shall be free. And you suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you" (Mark 7:10-13).

Jesus warned His disciples that there would come a time when people would kill true Christians in God's name, sincerely believing they were "do[ing] God service" (John 16:2).

Again, over two billion people attend church services or at least "try to be good" (by their own reasoning); they practice good works, helping the destitute. But in the end, they are not true Christians—not by Christ's standards! Of such people, He says, "I never knew you."

Why?

Because all of their good works, all of their efforts in striving to be "good" (at least in a general sense), have been done in vain. "In VAIN do they worship Me," Jesus said, "teaching for doctrines the commandments [and traditions] *of men*" (Mark 7:7). "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men…Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition" (vs. 8-9).

The word "vain" here means "fruitlessly; folly, to no purpose." Over a billion Christians on Earth pray to God, speak of His Work, and may (to varying degrees) keep God's commandments—yet, in Jesus Christ's eyes, all in an empty exercise!

Adding manmade traditions, codes, etc., not approved by God, works against the spiritual application of God's laws: love (Rom. 13:10). Popular religionists and even politicians say we cannot know God's will—but the Bible states otherwise (Rom. 12:2). Think: Would Christ command, "Be you therefore perfect [spiritually entire, complete], even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), yet not tell us *how* to achieve perfection or *what* He meant by becoming "perfect"? Would He tell us to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves, but not tell us *how* to achieve this?

Or course not!

Hebrews 1:1-2 states, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He has appointed

heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." God spoke to His people through Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry; in this sense, Christ was continuing His role as the Word, the Spokesman for the God Family (John 1).

Today, God speaks to us through His *written* Word, the Bible. A book of truth (John 17:17), it is a "quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). If one permits, the Bible will cut through the self-deception of carnal nature (Jer. 17:9), teaching the humble person the Will of God. (See II Timothy 3:14-17.)

True Christians simply allow the Bible to interpret the Bible, and follow what it teaches. Needlessly adding to Scripture extra codes and traditions that supposedly "enhance" God's Law is VAIN worship.

"Christianizing" Pagan Beliefs

Every year, the vast majority of professing Christians keep Christmas, Easter and other holidays steeped in ancient pagan rituals. They reason that these popular celebrations have somehow been "Christianized," turning practices and traditions rooted in idolatry—often once having involved gruesome child sacrifice—into now being approved by God.

But what does the God of the Bible say about these ideas?

After rescuing them from slavery, God warned Israel not to practice the customs they had acquired in Egypt, or to learn the ways and traditions of the Gentile nations they would encounter in the Promised Land (Lev. 18:1-3). Instead, God commanded Israel to follow His ways (vs. 4-5).

Why do so few heed this next passage? "Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the heathen are dismayed by them. For the customs of the people are vain" (Jer. 10:2-3).

But Israel did not listen. "And they have turned unto Me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. But they set their abominations in the house [the temple at Jerusalem], which is called by My name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin" (Jer. 32:33-35).

Imagine. Israel committed a sin so vile, so disgusting, that it even shocked God!

Concerning this pagan, satanic system, God commands true Christians to "come out of her, My people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

God commands His people to follow Him—not the traditions of men. God's ways are higher, better than man's (Isa. 55:8-9). Men cannot determine for themselves right from wrong or how to properly worship God.

Why? Because "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). God designed us and gave us life. He knows how we are to worship Him.

To be a true Christian and to properly serve God, one must live "by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4), recognizing that His Holy Scriptures "cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

The idolatry-drenched religious holidays and customs of this world seem like sincere, heartfelt sacred observances—but they are deeply rooted in pagan ideas that counterfeit God's will—and God says He hates them! Pagan observances cannot be "Christianized" or made clean by men. To do so is to worship God in VAIN.

Vain Repetition

As with all other doctrines in the Bible, "churchianity" has distorted and misapplied Christ's teaching on how to pray. Misguided theologians have twisted Matthew 6:5-15 and Luke 11:1-4. They have led millions into turning Jesus Christ's model prayer into a meaningless, word-for-word recitation. This was never Christ's intention!

In Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus instructed His disciples not to pray to be seen by men and to be considered "righteous." The Bible teaches that God will listen only to those who are teachable, humble and yielded to Him. Notice Isaiah 66: "Thus says the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that You build unto Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things has My hand made, and all those things have been, says the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word" (vs. 1-2).

Jesus used a parable to teach a valuable lesson to some who "trusted in themselves" (Luke 18:9): "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican [tax collector]. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as

this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (vs. 10-12). The Pharisee seemed to believe he was God's gift to mankind.

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (vs. 13). The tax collector saw himself from God's perspective and humbled himself.

Christ continued, "I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted" (vs. 14).

God will not listen to the prayers of the proud and arrogant (Jms. 4:6).

In Matthew 6, Jesus also warned His followers about praying in vain repetition—repeating the same words in a monotonous, chant-like drone, as millions of "Christians" do today. Then in verse 9, He states, "After this *manner* therefore pray…" The Greek word for "manner" is *houtos*, meaning "in this way." Christ was not teaching His disciples to follow this prayer word-for-word. Remember, He had just commanded them not to do this in verse 7. In contrast to the popular Jesus, so few pay attention to the One who inspired the Bible.

What Christ was teaching them (and us today) was a prayer outline, or model prayer, with topics to pray about and the general order they should follow. It is up to the person praying to provide details for each subject.

The example of Jezebel and the 450 prophets of Baal (I Kings 18) shows that endlessly babbling prayers is nothing but vain repetition—an empty exercise of communication that will reach no higher than the ceiling.

But contrary to the prophets of Baal, Elijah gave a simple, but earnest, prayer to God, which He answered. Here's why: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jms. 5:16)—which brings us to another point.

Obedience, Not Sacrifice

Believe it or not, one can observe God's Sabbath and annual Holy Days, and keep the letter of the Law—yet all in VAIN, in a show of empty, meaningless worship!

Regarding the modern descendants of ancient Israel, which God calls "people of Gomorrah," God states, "To what purpose is the

multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? says the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations [worthless sacrifices]; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. *Your* new moons and *your* appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isa. 1:11-15).

Most ministers and religionists claim this passage abolishes God's annual festivals—but that is not what God is condemning. He says, "YOUR new moons and YOUR appointed feasts My soul hates."

Elsewhere in Isaiah, God charges His faithful servants to warn the modern descendants of Israel of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:6-7) because of their religious hypocrisy: "CRY ALOUD, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." (Isa. 58:1).

Many of today's 600 million-plus people of modern Israel (who are unaware of their prophetic identity) believe they faithfully worship God, while they endlessly sprint through *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* "prayers." They volunteer in soup kitchens and other charities for the needy. They teach the "golden rule" of treating others properly. Yet all their works are in vain—because they do so *their* way, according to *their* terms.

God declares that "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God" (Isa. 58:2). They appear to be righteous, but they actually wear the clothes of SELF-righteousness, claiming to be God-fearing people while ignoring Proverbs 8:13: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward [perverse] mouth, do I hate."

God charges His servants to deliver His end-time warning to Jacob—but the reaction they receive is shallow: "And they come unto you as the people come, and they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, *but they will not DO them*: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness. And, lo, you are unto them as a very lovely song of one [Hebrew: A good singer] that has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an

instrument: for they hear you words, BUT THEY DO THEM NOT" (Ezek. 33:31-32).

These same people arrogantly ask of God, "Wherefore have we fasted…and You see not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge?" (Isa. 58:3).

God answers, "Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold, you fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: you shall not fast as you do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high" (vs. 3-4).

He adds, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to deal your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor that are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?" (vs. 6-7). And that "you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words" (vs. 13).

In other words, put Christianity into ACTION God's Way, not your own!

Even after witnessing God's punishment of deporting the house of Israel into national slavery, Judah thought it could not happen to them. *After all*, they reasoned, *Israel changed God's Holy Days and worshipped idols and false gods*. *But Jerusalem had Solomon's Temple, the Levitical priesthood and the daily sacrifices*.

Nonetheless, having the Temple did not wipe away Judah's secret sins. It did not save them from being punished for appearing to be faithful while in reality they were rebellious. Read Ezekiel 8, in which seemingly righteous religious leaders privately worshipped false gods. Verses 13-16 reveal that, while claiming to serve God, people actually worshipped Tammuz and the sun—ancient pagan practices known today as "Easter"! (This will be covered in more detail momentarily.)

But God said, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hos. 6:6)—and "to obey is better than sacrifice" (I Sam. 15:22).

"Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:6-8).

To worship and serve the true God requires rejecting one's human nature—which is self-deceptive (Jer. 17:9; Prov. 16:25), hostile toward God (Rom. 8:7), and cannot subject itself to God's Law (same verse). It means praying to, obeying and serving Him HIS way.

Anything less is to worship God in VAIN.

"Another Jesus"?

Paul warned those of his day—and forewarned all later generations—of a clever counterfeit facing the early Church—one that is directly, yet subtly, related to vain worship: "For if he that comes preaches *another Jesus*, whom we have not preached, or if you receive another spirit, which you have not received, or *another gospel*, which you have not accepted, you might well bear with him" (II Cor. 11:4).

The Greek word translated "another" in this verse is *allos*, meaning "different." Paul warned of a *different* Jesus—not the One of the Bible, not the only begotten Son of God, but an IMPOSTOR.

In other words, the "another Jesus" is NOT the *true* Jesus

Paul, who was inspired by the *true* Jesus Christ of the Bible, was moved to record the peril of unwittingly following "another Jesus." Whomever you may think this false Jesus to be—and most have probably never remotely considered the idea for even a moment—there *is* such a thing as a wrong, different and *false* Jesus—called "another Jesus." The subtlety of *how* this can occur, and how it has occurred in history, is so deceptive—so seductive—that even true Christians can unknowing slip into worshipping this so-called Jesus. This was happening to the Corinthians.

Millions maintain a *pretense* of Christianity, but it is only a façade, of whom Paul described as "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (II Tim. 3:5). For them, the final authority in matters of faith and moral behavior is not the Word of God, but the inner workings of the human mind. Some denominations view the Bible as merely a historical document requiring human interpretation to correct its "errors."

People unknowingly worship in ways that are far different from what they sincerely believe or intend. When one does not understand the "simplicity in Christ" (II Cor. 11:3) and allow the Bible to interpret itself, the inevitable result is to soon be unwittingly following a different savior (vs. 4).

The "Jesus" commonly spoken of in the large denominations of accepted Christianity promotes the idea that obeying God's divine laws is no longer needed because they were "nailed to the cross." All a Christian must do is "accept and believe in Him" to be assured a place in heaven. Because of such false ideas, the majority of believers reject the seventh-day Sabbath, the annual Holy Days and other truths of the Bible, leaving an open door for a host of non-biblical practices that God calls *abominations*.

Paul foretold a time when fables and the traditions of men would be substituted for the truth: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3-4).

This deception began in the first century, but has grown much worse in recent times. Most receive teachers who tell them what they *want* to hear rather than what they *need* to hear. Wrong conduct is justified—explained away—giving no regard to the warning, "WOE unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). God does not take lightly those who place their view of His laws and way of life in place of HIS view.

Paul wrote of "another gospel" and "another spirit," appearing in conjunction with this "another Jesus." History reveals that traditional Christianity brought in a *different* Jesus. And with him came a *different* gospel, a social gospel of "love" and "tolerance"—one that does not require any personal responsibility, such as repentance. Its message is "come as you are" and "believe on Jesus" to receive salvation.

Today, everyone hears much *about* the person of Jesus Christ—confining the message solely to the things about the Son of God, but not about the MESSAGE He brought: the kingdom of God, the only government that will bring universal peace, security, abundance and prosperity to all nations and peoples. Sadly, millions believe *on* Jesus, but do not actually believe Him—they do not DO what He taught!

The MASTER COUNTERFEITER (Satan the devil, who we have seen is called the "god of this world" in II Cor. 4:4) seeks to counterfeit *every* aspect of God's plan. We have seen that he "deceives the *whole* world" (Rev. 12:9). As the ARCH-DECEIVER, he would not be content to counterfeit all *other* aspects of Christianity but not the identity and worship of the true Savior!

You are about to learn of the astonishing parallel between the "saviors" found throughout ancient religion and the popular "savior"

worshipped today in Christendom. It is also a fact that these ancient counterfeit saviors were often worshipped in conjunction with springtime festivals of renewal. The modern face of these festivals is the pagan Easter celebration.

Easter—Condemned in the Bible!

It will come as a surprise to most that Easter is mentioned repeatedly in the Bible—but never in a good context. In fact, God condemns the custom in the strongest possible terms. We will see that Easter is interwoven with the worship of Baal and sun worship.

Before concluding that this cannot be true, force yourself to consider the facts of history. It is vital to understand the *origin* of Easter, and its connection to the Jesus worshipped by millions, because this spring celebration is considered the holiest in the Christian calendar.

So then, who or what is Easter? From where does this term derive?

The following sources answer the question: "What means the term Easter itself? It is not a Christian name. It bears its Chaldean origin on its very forehead. *Easter* is nothing else than *Astarte*, one of the titles of Beltis, the *queen of heaven*…Now, the Assyrian goddess, or Astarte, is identified with Semiramis by Athenagoras (*Legatio*, vol. ii. p. 179), and by Lucian (*De Dea Syria*, vol. iii. p. 382)…Now, no name could more exactly picture forth the character of Semiramis, as queen of Babylon, than the name of 'Asht-tart,' for that just means 'The woman that made towers'…Ashturit, then…is obviously the same as the Hebrew '*Ashtoreth*'" (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, pp. 103, 307-308, emphasis ours).

Notice this conclusive quote from *Microsoft Encarta Multimedia Encyclopedia*: "Ishtar was the Great Mother, the goddess of fertility and the *queen of heaven*." In Jeremiah 7:18, God condemned baking cakes (hot cross buns) to the "queen of heaven." So, in actuality, Ashtaroth (Ishtar) was Nimrod's (Gen. 10:8-10) harlotrous, mother/wife widow, Semiramis, as many other ancient historians attest! Easter is none other than Ashtaroth! More proof will follow, but we can now examine the scriptures that show how God views the worship of this pagan goddess—by any name.

Easter, Baal and Israel

Now that we know that Easter is the goddess *Ashtaroth*, we need to look into the Bible and see what God thinks of her, and notice her connection to Baal.

This first of two sources about Baal comes from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and it begins to connect Baal to Ashtaroth: "The Semitic word baal, meaning owner or master, was also used in ancient religions for lord or god, and it is still defined as a Canaanite or Phoenician deity. Among the greatest of the Semitic peoples' deities were Baal and Astarte—both symbols of fertility. Baal, the god of the sun, was supposed to make crops grow and flocks increase. Astarte [was] the goddess of the moon…"

Now read this quote from *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition: "Baal had become the ruler of the universe. The Ugarit tablets make him chief of the Canaanite pantheon. He is the source of life and fertility, the mightiest hero, the lord of war, and the defeater of the god Yam. There were many temples of Baal in Canaan, and the name Baal was often added to that of a locality, e.g., Baal-peor, Baal-hazor, Baal-hermon. The Baal cult penetrated Israel and at times led to *syncretism*…The practice of sacred prostitution seems to have been associated with the worship of Baal in Palestine and the cult was vehemently denounced by the prophets…" (emphasis ours).

Baal was the most popular and powerful god of his time, considered to be "ruler of the universe," and Israel wanted to be associated with—to worship—both Baal *and* the true God. Hence, the above reference to "syncretism," which is the mixing of true and false religion—the worship of the true God mixed with customs, practices and worship of other gods.

Merging worship of the true God with Baal worship was Israel's problem. It led Elijah to indict all Israel: "How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (I Kgs. 18:21).

Now let's examine Israel's involvement with Baal and Ashtaroth: "And the children of Israel did *evil* in the sight of the Lord…And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and *Ashtaroth* [Easter]" (Judges 2:11, 13).

The context of the passage shows that God allowed His people to be taken from their land into foreign captivity as a result of *this sin!* It continues, explaining that God delivered His people over and over again through a series of judges. After each deliverance, Israel returned to the same false gods, which in turn brought *another* captivity, via conquest by the nations around them. They never seemed to learn, as verse 19 makes clear: "And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves…*in following other gods*…and…they ceased not from *their own doings*, nor from

their *stubborn way*." In chapter 10, verse 6, Israel repeats this pattern of rebellion and stubbornness. And God, just as insistently, called it evil—as He still does today.

Baal and Ashtaroth worship reappeared during the prophet Samuel's time. Samuel told Israel, "…*put away* the strange gods and *Ashtaroth* from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and *serve Him only*…Then the children of Israel *did* put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and *served the* LORD *only*" (I Sam. 7:3-4). Later, in I Samuel 12:10-11, Samuel publicly recounted Israel's history to them. He reminded them that they continually returned to obeying God, only to fall backward into idolatry time and time again!

Let's read one final example. The Bible states that King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. Yet, he made a mistake God considered so great that, after his death, He punished Solomon by removing the kingdom from his son.

His mistake?

Solomon married a Gentile "stranger" who led him into the worship of Easter (Ashtaroth). Notice I Kings 11:4-6: "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods…For Solomon went after *Ashtaroth* the goddess of the Zidonians…And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went *not fully* after the LORD, as did David his father." Verses 11-12 demonstrate that the kingdom *was*, in fact, taken from his son.

God considered worship of this goddess as outright "evil." This was even though Solomon was only "not *fully*" seeking the true God.

It has been said, "The only thing man has learned from history is that no one learns from history." George Santayana took it further, stating, as we saw, "Those who do not learn the lesson of history are *doomed to repeat it*."

This lesson describes ancient Israel—but it also describes today's modern world. Because Israel could not stay on track, they were eventually taken into captivity, eventually becoming lost to history! (After one more captivity and punishment, prophecy reveals that God will gather them from a final, coming captivity.)

This paragraph requires far too much explanation for this book. In fact, it requires its own full book to explain—*America and Britain in Prophecy*. You have never read anything like it.

What History Reveals

We are now prepared to examine the astonishing record from history, and allow it to expose the popular "another Jesus" worshipped today

for who he *really* is. Prepare to be stunned—and, hopefully, even more deeply motivated to act upon all that you are learning!

First, there is this: "…the conception of a Saviour-God was quite normal in the ancient pagan world…a conception of salvation underlies the notion of such Gods as Osiris, Attis, and Adonis…" (John M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 395).

And then this incredible admission: "It has often been urged that this belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is due to ideas of divine resurrection current in the contemporary world…stories of Attis, Adonis, and Osiris…In the pagan stories the rising again is a joyous reversal of defeat; in the Christian story it is the complement of victorious death. It may be said that Attis and Osiris saved by rising again, Jesus by dying…the Easter observance did not arise at once out of belief in the Resurrection, but developed later by gradual stages out of the Jewish Pasch. The notion implied in the Easter greeting *Christ is risen* is a secondary development; the idea comes from this festival and from its occurrence in spring; the festival does not come from the idea. The idea of Christ's resurrection was injected into the old practice of Easter observance and not the other way around" (A. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background*, pp. 105-107, emphasis ours throughout).

The powerful theme of this oft-repeated counterfeit is made absolutely clear by the famous historian, James George Frazer: "Now the death and resurrection of Attis were officially celebrated at Rome on the 24th and 25th of March, the latter being regarded as the spring equinox, and…according to an ancient and widespread tradition Christ suffered on the 25th of March…the tradition which placed the death of Christ on the 25th of March…is all the more remarkable because astronomical considerations prove that it can have had *no historical foundation*…When we remember that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen Midsummer festival of water; that the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls [Halloween] in November is a continuation of an old heathen feast of the dead; and that the Nativity of Christ himself was assigned to the winter solstice in December because that day was deemed the Nativity of the Sun; we can hardly be thought to be rash or unreasonable in conjecturing that the other cardinal festival of the Christian church—the solemnization of Easter—may have been in like manner, and from like motives of edification, adapted to a similar celebration of the Phrygian god Attis at the vernal equinox…*It is a*

remarkable coincidence…that the Christian and the heathen festivals of the divine death and resurrection should have been solemnized at the same season…*It is difficult to regard the coincidence as purely accidental*" (*The Golden Bough*, Vol. I, pp. 306-309, emphasis ours).

While very extensive, this next and final source is perhaps the most powerful—and the most fascinating to understand. Let its message crash on your ears: "The similarity of ancient pagan legends and beliefs with Christian traditions was so great that they excited the attention and undisquised [sic] wrath of the early Christian…not knowing how to explain it. Tertullian said, 'The Devil, by the mysteries of his idols, imitates even the main part of the divine mysteries.' Furthermore Cortez, too, complained that the Devil had possibly taught the Mexicans that same thing that God taught Christendom. The common idea is that pagan gods fled away at Christ's coming, yet it is well known to every Bible student [that] this is contrary to fact. At the time of the recorded appearance of Jesus, and for some centuries before, there were temples without dedicated to Apollo or Dionysius among the Greeks, or Hercules among the Romans, Mithra among the Persians, Baal and Astarte among the Babylonians, and temples dedicated to other gods. An outstanding phenomenon is apparent: notwithstanding great geographic distance, racial difference between cults and in detail of services, the *general outline of creeds and ceremonies* were—if not identical—*markedly similar*.

"A fact that cannot be considered coincidental is, that of 11 main deities from the seven countries, it was believed of all or nearly all that these deities' births were on or near Christmas, of a virgin mother, in a cave underground, that they led a life of toil for man. They were thought to have been light bringers, healers, mediators, and into saviors. They were vanguished [sic] by the power of darkness, descended into hell or the underworld, to have arisen to become pioneers of mankind to a heavenly world…Krishna [part of the Hindu trinity], the god of India is an outstanding example of a parallel with the life of Christ. The idea of God sacrificing his son for the salvation of the world is so remote and remarkable—*yet it ranges through all ancient religion and back to the earliest times and is embodied in their rituals*" (Edward Carpenter, *Pagan and Christian Creeds*).

We can summarize the last two sources. The universal church at Rome often incorporated pagan festivals—pasting Christian-sounding names over them and calling them "Christian." This was done to make Christianity more palatable and familiar to heathen worshippers, whom the Church was trying to attract. It became easy—natural—for the masses who accepted Christianity to be permitted to bring the familiar

customs, traditions and beliefs about their own "savior" into worship of the new "savior," from then on to be referred to as "Jesus Christ."

While there is not space in this chapter to thoroughly cover the entire history and origin of this different "Jesus," a brief summary, followed by one more revealing statement from history, is helpful.

The Mother and the Savior

Semiramis (Easter) was both the mother and wife of Nimrod, described in Genesis 10:8-10, who was the great-grandson of Noah and the original Baal. In a blatant attempt to rebel against God shortly after the Flood—and the Tower of Babel was built so that civilization would be impervious to "any other flood that God might bring"—history shows that this mother/son duo appointed themselves as gods to be worshipped. History also records that Noah's son Shem (Nimrod's great-uncle) eventually tracked down and killed Nimrod, and sent his body parts throughout his kingdom. (This is also what happened to Osiris, the "father" in the Egyptian trinity with Horus and Isis.) Semiramis fled for her life, only to return 30 years later with her younger son, Horus (the son in the Egyptian trinity), whom she said was born supernaturally and was the reincarnation of Nimrod—the resurrected savior! Nimrod was Horus' supposed father, and Semiramis claimed that she had immaculately conceived him. She also claimed that she came from the moon in a giant egg that fell into the Euphrates river and that this occurred after the spring equinox on the first full moon. This moon egg was known as Ishtar's (pronounced Easter's) Egg. She reinstituted worship of herself and Nimrod, calling herself the mother of god and queen of heaven, among other things, by saying that Nimrod symbolized the sun as it "died" during the long cold winter. She also taught that Nimrod was resurrected, and that his son Horus was resurrected to join him in heaven, and Nimrod's resurrection was represented by the sun returning each spring to warm the Earth and renew life.

While there is much more to the story than can be included here, Semiramis' new "mystery system" eventually spread to all peoples of the Earth, as the earlier sources reveal.

Now notice this from the *Creation Epic*, speaking of Nimrod, the original "savior" of the world: "As for us, by however many names we call him, he is our god! Let us proclaim his 50 names…"

Here are some of them from history, many of which God condemned Israel for having followed: Nimrod, Molech, Chemosh, Baal, Milcom, Bacchus, Dagon, Osiris, Saturn, Adonis, Cupid, Apis,

Volcon, Attis, Kronos and Tammuz, the son in the Babylonian trinity with Ninas (Nimrod) and Ishtar (Easter). (Ezekiel 8:14-16 directly connects Tammuz—the resurrected son of, and reincarnation of, Nimrod—to sunrise services and sun worship, which God calls there an abomination.)

It can now be better understood *why* the apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians to beware of the subtle deceit of "another Jesus *whom we have not preached*." The original apostles understood that "another" very different "Jesus" whom they had "not preached" had existed for millennia.

Bible "believers" today can *think* that they are worshipping the true Savior when they are really worshipping a *false savior*—"another Jesus"!

Understand. The entirety of traditional Christianity is worshipping Baal, the mediator and sun god, who was named after his "wife" Ishtar (who we have seen was really his *mother* Semiramis).

The modern mother/child "Mary/Jesus" emphasis, including the worshipful adoration of Mary by millions, is a parallel with Semiramis and Nimrod that cannot be missed, even at a cursory glance.

"Another Jesus"—Brought by "Another Spirit"

This chapter, and in fact the whole book, is not complete without some summary understanding that ties together what it means to correctly identify the true Jesus—the real Christ—of the Bible.

We have seen that professing Christianity unwittingly worships a false Jesus ("another Jesus"), who brings with him a false gospel about the Person of Jesus Christ. Now pause and grasp the additional seriousness of *what else* bringing another "gospel" means—the grave danger of what is actually being brought for worship with this revised "gospel." The reader *must* understand why God places a curse (see Gal. 1:8-9) on those who pervert the gospel—those who blur or confuse His literally "Genesis-to-Revelation" announcement about His coming world-ruling SUPERGOVERNMENT.

The attempt to bring "Jesus" into the gospel derives from a much greater danger, not only that of "*another* Jesus," but one born of "another *spirit*." In the first century, we saw that some in the Corinth congregation began to believe "another gospel" and "another Jesus," and did not recognize that these were connected to a *third* problem—that of following "another SPIRIT."

In I John 4:6, the apostle John labels this alien spirit the "*spirit* of error," and contrasts it to the "*Spirit* of truth." Take a moment to

read this verse. It is this *spirit of error* that is guiding the churches of professing Christianity in its many denominations and branches—and this spirit is connected to a counterfeit "body of Christ."

Recognize the gravity of this knowledge. Understand *why* it is absolutely vital to get this point clear in your mind!

Extreme Danger!

Another critically important element ties in here, and is connected directly to the Church that Christ has built (Matt. 16:18)—the only Church where the true Christ is leading His Work, and the true gospel is being preached. The living Jesus Christ has always worked exclusively leading only one, unified, organized, uncompromising Church—the biblical Body of Christ.

As we read in Chapter Fourteen, the "Christian" world teaches that the Body of Christ—Jesus' Church—consists of *many* denominations, fellowships or "communities of believers," said to all be connected by the "Holy Spirit" working in believers wherever they are affiliated. And we saw the many scriptures explaining the truth of what the Bible teaches about the Body of Christ.

Here is what the reader must be able to recognize: The entire professing Christian world believes in a *different* (counterfeit) "body" of a *different* (counterfeit) "Christ," emanating from an entirely *different* (counterfeit) "spirit" that is NOT the Spirit of God. All of these confused, competing churches are led by the "*spirit* of disobedience" that is plainly identified in Ephesians 2:2—and shown to be sent from the now understood "god of this world"!

Spirit of Disobedience

Let's now examine the central "earmark" that will always reveal to the discerning observer where the "spirit of disobedience" is at work. This phrase is in the context of Paul reminding the Ephesian congregation how they had come out of a different way of life—described as the "course of this world"—in which they had been under the sway of the "prince of the power of the air."

First notice this: "Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience" (2:2).

We now go full circle from the beginning of the chapter—and in one sense the whole book. Disobedience is the opposite of obedience, and obedience is something that one either displays toward God, or

does not. One either obeys God's Law—the Ten Commandments!—or, no matter the reasons he may have or his underlying "theology," he disobeys it!

We saw that almost all of the professing Christian world teaches that God's Law—His Commandments—were "nailed to the cross" by Jesus (now seen to be another one) through His sacrifice. We also saw that thousands of preachers tell hundreds of millions of parishioners every Sunday that "that Old Testament Law" has been "done away" by Christ. They are routinely told, "You do not need to keep it. It was kept for you by Jesus."

And we also saw that millions believe them!

But Romans 8:7 has explained to the reader that human beings are naturally hostile to God and His Law. The terrible fruits of that disobedience are the tragic record of humanity's last six millennia.

The true Jesus Christ taught His disciples, "If you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). We saw that it is these very commandments that define the love of God, and this is made plain by Romans 13:10 and I John 5:3. While the world speaks endlessly of "love" with its "Jesus," it is not the real love of God that the Bible describes. The "Jesus" of this world brings a very different message about the importance of law-keeping than that of Matthew 19:17, Romans 13:10, I John 5:3 and many more passages in the New Testament that could be cited.

By now it should be understood that the "prince of the power of the air" is the same as the "god of this world," the "spirit of error," "another spirit" and the "spirit of disobedience." Obviously, this "god"—and spirit—is Satan the devil. Of course, Satan would never actually reveal himself as the devil, or by any of Paul's inspired descriptions of him referenced here. Almost none would follow him if he did.

The devil has hidden his true identity under the guise of the triune god.

This very different spirit drives the thinking of all modern theology. Under the "power" of this spirit—and Paul shows that this god does have REAL POWER—theologians have devised the concept of the trinity. These have cast off the commandments of God, the first four of which would have insulated and protected them—and all humanity—from all false gods and the resultant error—and endless troubles—that come from following them—and from worry about following the wrong Jesus.

Therefore, it is absolutely imperative to the "god of this world" who stands *behind the trinity* (and the "Jesus" woven within it) that its adherents not return to commandment-keeping! He must, at all costs,

try to prevent people from returning to the only Law that will lead them away from him to the true God—and the true Christ! Recognize that disobedience is the central feature in how Satan's "voice" is identified.

Grasp this. *Satan* is the spirit behind the almost universally accepted false god known as the trinity! When fully understood, those who believe that God is three-in-one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are worshipping ANOTHER JESUS!

(The subject of the popular triune god is much too large for this chapter, and requires its own thorough book to fully explain and document. You are urged to read *The Trinity – Is God Three-in-one?*)

The "Voice of Christ"

One final towering fact. The true Jesus Christ of the Bible taught that His sheep "know His voice" (John 10:4). Later in John, Jesus stated, "Everyone that is *of the truth* hears My voice" (18:37). The voice of Christ is here defined as TRUTH!

The true Christ's sheep know—can discern—the true Christ's voice, and can distinguish it from the "voice of a stranger," which is synonymous with the voice of "another Jesus" and the ministers who represent him.

Get this straight! The spirit of the true Christ, who taught the only true gospel, does not direct the "churches" and "works" of those worshipping another Jesus inside the trinity, who, again, is part of another gospel, derived from another spirit, all of which appears with another counterfeit "body of Christ"—the disobeying, divided, disagreeing, competing confusion that is thought to be bona fide, real Christianity.

The true Christ's voice is in part directly identified with its emphasis on commandment-keeping, and this must never be forgotten in light of all that you have come to understand throughout this book!

This has been repeated over and over in different ways for emphasis. This is so the reader can see the clear connection between the fundamental elements of the true Jesus Christ—and true Christianity—in contrast to the counterfeits of each.

Read and reread all that you have seen here until it becomes crystal clear in your mind—until it is impossible to misunderstand what is at stake in which church you attend. Remember, the true Christ is not divided (I Cor. 12:13)—meaning there is only one true Church of God! Until you find that Church—the one, unified Body of Christ—you cannot have contact with the living Christ who heads it—and only it!

As Corinth attests, this wrong but subtle teaching about the counterfeit Jesus and his "body" is so clever, so seductive, so elusive to those who do not examine it closely, that it has even fooled many of God's people—those of Christ's true Church—through the ages.

Chapter Six explained that the problem in Corinth was traced to brethren there listening to false ministers. Almost immediately after warning of a false Jesus, gospel and spirit, Paul identified this problem, explaining *how* they had been fooled. Notice a final time: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:13-15).

Human beings can worship in ways that represent things very, very different from what they sincerely believe or intend. Not everything is as it seems.

Sadly, the ministers of mainstream Christianity—all of them—preach "another Jesus" and subsequently "another gospel," leading vast millions astray from worshipping and obeying the true God. As a result, their religious practices and traditions are carried out in VAIN.

So says God in His Word!

What Will You Do?

After 19 chapters and almost 300 pages, consider all that you have learned about the life and ministry of the *true* Jesus Christ—and about "another Jesus."

The One who became Jesus Christ pre-existed as the Word (*Logos*), or Spokesman, for the God Family. His birth was unique; He was both God and Man. He was legally (through Joseph) and physically (through Mary) descended from the royal line of King David.

Jesus grew up in a strong middle-class family of imperfect parents, brothers and sisters in humble circumstances. They observed the annual Holy Days, which picture God's Plan of Salvation for Mankind. He also observed the weekly Sabbath. Jesus was reared a Galilean, and therefore was looked down upon for not being "cosmopolitan," a recognized religious scholar or coming from aristocracy, as did His contemporaries in Jerusalem. And His physical appearance, as prophesied centuries in advance, was at best average—far from the handsome image promoted by Hollywood epics.

Christ was born when anticipation of the Messiah's impending arrival was in the air, and when Rome changed from a republic to a conquering empire, clearing the way for the gospel of the kingdom to spread to diverse kingdoms, cities, cultures, regions and territories.

Before starting His ministry, Christ defeated Satan in a titanic battle of wills, and qualified to replace him in ruling the Earth. He then called the disciples from humble origins, and with His Father's guid-

ance, personally prepared them, through an intense training period, to become apostles.

Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons and preached the gospel to the poor, which He cited as evidence of the Messiah's ministry. Yet despite these—and spectacular miracles such as walking on water, feeding thousands of people with a few pieces of fish and bread, and other marvelous acts—critics would not accept His words or His authority. Because of their stubborn unbelief, the only sign that Jesus gave them proving He was the Christ was the sign of Jonah: remaining three nights and three days in the grave, and then being resurrected.

Jesus repeatedly taught that He and His Father, though separate Beings, were "one" in the same mind and purpose—in total agreement, setting the ultimate example of harmony and unity that all human beings will someday achieve.

We learned the truth of Christ's final Passover and the meaning of the symbols He instituted. We read about how and why Jesus suffered for humanity, and the meaning and purpose of His perfect sacrifice. We also learned that not only did Jesus allow His body, blood and life to be sacrificed for sins He did not commit—His trial was completely illegal.

And we read what Christ is doing today: building, feeding, protecting, strengthening, guiding, training and governing His Church.

Jesus Christ preached a message that is today entirely *unknown* to the multiplying, disagreeing and competing churches of professing Christianity—it was the GOOD NEWS of the kingdom of God, the only government that will bring justice, equity, peace, happiness, abundance and prosperity to all peoples and nations. This centerpiece of Jesus' ministry is another of the many things He taught that so few have heard and almost no one believes.

We also saw how people, despite the sincerest intentions, can worship God in vain, and even unknowingly serve a false "Jesus."

What Does the *True* Christ Expect of You?

Notice Acts 17:30, where Paul is speaking: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at…" God is calling only a select few into the understanding of His truth and to live His way of life. At this moment, God still "winks at" the way humanity lives. But there is coming a time, during and after Christ's millennial rule, when He will hold every human being who has ever lived accountable for his actions. Paul continues, "…but now commands all men everywhere to

repent"—to change their carnal thoughts, attitudes, words and actions, and to live the way God always intended.

It takes faith to change, to reject the pulls of the flesh, Satan and society, and permit Christ to live in you through His Spirit. It means growing from human faith to the faith of Christ ("from faith to faith") to come under Jesus' authority and submit to His government, administered in His Church.

Being called into the way of *true* Christianity means you must permit God to build His holy, righteous character within you—a lifelong process involving time, trials, tests and lessons. You must yield yourself as clay to the Master Potter. You must put your will aside and get out of the way. You must voluntarily choose to "Enter you in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and *few* there be that find [Greek: are finding] it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

The path leading to God's kingdom is not easy. But consider: This life is short, limited—temporary. Once it is gone, it is gone forever. Building perfect, godly character is the only thing anyone can carry into eternal life, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption" (I Cor. 15:50).

With God's way of life come endless benefits for faithful obedience, by which we have "confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John 3:21-22).

God's is a path that leads to inheriting "all things" (Heb. 1:2; 2:8-10)—the Moffatt translation says "the universe"—as "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), "the firstborn among many brethren" (vs. 29).

Jesus Christ set the example, the pattern for overcoming sin and focusing one's life on being born into the kingdom of God. To those whom God calls out from the ways of this world (Rev. 18:4), "it is God which works in you both to WILL and to DO of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

There are two opposing ways of life. One is described as the way of "give," the other the way of "get." The very greatest teachings of Jesus is that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Of course, Christ set the ultimate example by giving Himself for mankind. The give way for Christians begins with recognizing they belong to God as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Being called also means being willing to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"—to untangle and disengage "himself

with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier" (II Tim. 2:3-4). It means a life of waging spiritual warfare (II Cor. 10:3-6)—but also of enjoying unbounded happiness at the same time!

The way of *true* Christianity is infinitely more than mere talk—it requires ACTION. It brings with it security, peace of mind, excitement, thrilling news of God's Work, and a host of blessings—including the greatest one: hearing Christ say upon His Return, "Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter you into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:21). In other words, rulership under Christ in His kingdom.

Full Circle

Finally, consider again this literally bedrock passage: "Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of Mine, and *does* them, I will *liken Him unto a wise man*, which built his house *upon a rock*: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24-25).

Will YOU be "a wise man" and build on rock—the real teachings of the *true* Jesus Christ?

Or…"And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine, and does them *not*, shall be *likened unto a foolish man*, which built his house *upon the sand*: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (vs. 26-27).

Will YOU be "a foolish man" and build on sand—the false teachings of "another Jesus"?

Choose One

This book has separated fact from fiction—with irrefutable proof. It has *exposed* "another Jesus" and *revealed* the true Jesus Christ. Both of these stand before you. Make no mistake. You cannot claim to follow the right Jesus while following the path and teachings of the wrong one. Which one you choose represents the GREATEST CHOICE you will ever make! The contrast is profound—and stunning…

• One "Jesus" teaches that the law of God was done away—the true Jesus Christ teaches that "if you will enter into life, keep the commandments."

• One has been invented and sent by the "god of this world"—the Other is genuine, and was sent by God the Father, with Whom He is one.

• One received his instructions from numerous ancient, mythical pagan "saviors," all patterned after an early human rebel—the Other was sent from heaven to do the will of the Father.

• One was weak, skinny, effeminate and had long hair—the Other was rugged, strong, masculine and wore hair closely cropped.

• One is largely seen as either a helpless newborn in a manger or dead on a cross—the Other is all-powerful and sitting at the right hand of God.

• One died of a "broken" heart because he was in emotional shock and grief—the Other voluntarily humbled Himself, gladly took upon Himself the sins of all mankind and willingly shed His blood.

• One looks as though he barely suffered and shed little blood before and while on the stake—the Other was unrecognizably "marred more than any man."

• One talked about himself and called it the "gospel"—the Other was sent by the Father to announce the gospel of the kingdom of God.

• One teaches the kingdom of God is here now—the Other teaches that it will arrive at His Return.

• One teaches that his followers must spread an *already-existing* kingdom as they seek to fix *this world*—the Other teaches that His kingdom will come at His Return, and that His followers will first restore and then continue ruling cities and nations in the *world to come*.

• One largely defines the Christian mission as giving money and aid to the poor—the Other said to give them the gospel of the kingdom of God.

• One authorizes observance of the first day of the week, the day of the sun—the Other hallowed the seventh day and declares that He is "Lord of the Sabbath."

• One teaches adherence to ancient pagan holidays condemned in the Bible—the Other teaches observance of the seven annual Holy Days outlined in Scripture and commanded forever.

• One permits the unrestrained worship of idols, images and pictures—the Other condemns all forms of this in His Second Commandment.

• One permits vain repetition in prayer—the Other labels this "the way of the heathen," before explaining the true "manner" of prayer.

• One celebrates his birthday in late December, through use of a time-honored pagan festival of wild celebration—the Other was born in the early Autumn and condemns this pagan tradition as an abomination.

• One endorses the pagan Easter celebration, the worship of the Egyptian/Babylonian goddess Ishtar/Ashtaroth—the Other commands observance of God's Passover.

• One permits his "supper" to be kept as often as his followers wish—the Other commands partaking of bread, wine and footwashing once a year at a set time.

• One broke his word, and the only sign that he was the Messiah, and was in the grave just 36 hours—the Other kept His word, proving He was the Messiah, by remaining for exactly three days and three nights.

• One claims to have been resurrected the early morning of the first day of the week—the Other was resurrected late Saturday afternoon.

• One was merely resurrected physically, bodily—the Other returned to the God Family with a glorious Spirit Body.

• One is the author of counterfeit "healing revivals" where participants fall backwards—the Other brings genuine healing of the sick through the laying on of hands.

• One encourages worship of his human mother—the Other knew that His mother *was* "blessed," but placed no greater emphasis on her.

• One had no brothers or sisters because his mother was an always-to-be-celibate virgin—the Other had four brothers and at least two sisters.

• One is a dead savior with dead teachings building dead churches with dead stones—the Other is alive and brings living truth from His living Word to a living Church He is building with living stones.

• One blindly repeats that you are saved by his death—the Other reveals and explains how you are "saved by His life."

• One tells his followers that upon death they are either "going to heaven" or an "ever-burning hell," because they have an "immortal soul"—the Other teaches that they will ultimately either rule with Him on this Earth or be destroyed forever in the lake of fire, and that they *are* souls.

• One teaches that being born again occurs at conversion—the Other teaches that it occurs at the resurrection, when He returns.

• One has done away with tithing to make himself more appealing and easier to serve—the Other bluntly declares that "this ought you to have done" and to neglect tithing is to "rob God."

• One, paradoxically however, reflects the Christian walk as burdensome and austere—the Other says, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" and "My joy I leave with you."

• One has followers who build their own thousands of differing, divided churches, and who, because they cannot agree on his teachings, necessarily offer a widely inclusive, counterfeit "body of Christ" to house them—the Other built one unified Church, one undivided Body and Temple, where everyone walks in harmony, believing and speaking the same thing.

• One permits lay members in his churches to hire and replace their pastors, and these to select or remove their highest leaders—the Other governs His Church from the top down, and selects and trains His ministers of every office, who are themselves over His flock.

• One is worshipped by billions and leads all brands of this world's recognized, accepted Christendom—the Other has but one discounted, persecuted "little flock" that has come out of the world.

• One sends missionaries around the world to have the masses "profess" him and "get saved"—the Other directs His Church to announce the kingdom of God to all nations, knowing that only the Father decides who comes to His Son.

• One carries neither real power nor real authority, and his churches operate on human strength—the Other has all power and authority in heaven and Earth, and divinely strengthens His dynamic Church.

• One says, "come just as you are"—the Other commands to "Repent [change] and believe the gospel."

• One declares, "You are *already* saved," because "once saved, always saved"—the Other declares (twice), "He that endures to the end shall be saved," as well as "to him that *overcomes* will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I overcame…"

• One does not care how you worship him—what customs and doctrines you believe—the Other is a "jealous God" demanding in John 4 that we "worship Him in Spirit and truth."

• One works through "another spirit," the "spirit of error," the "spirit of disobedience"—the Other works through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the "Spirit of truth."

• One "Jesus" is well-known to the world—the *true* Jesus Christ is unknown to Christianity, but is now known to you.

You must now choose!

The Following Literature Expands on Topics Discussed in This Book:

- Do the Saved Go to Heaven?
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